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THE SPECTATOR

Germany falling

Hans Kundnani on a national identity crisis

**Don't bother
with Spectre**
Deborah Ross

**THE PLOT TO
OUST CORBYN**
NICK COHEN

**THE LEGEND OF
DAVID FROST**
RICHARD INGRAMS

**LORDS OF
MISRULE**
JAMES FORSYTH

**ON MAGIC
MUSHROOMS**
JEREMY CLARKE



**Barry
Humphries's
diary**



FROM THE HEART OF EURASIA

WELCOME TO THE NEW SILK ROAD

First Officer Timur Mashurov, former Kazakhstan Rugby captain,
and his 4000 team members welcome you to Astana in comfort
and style.



The Australian example

For many years, Australia has been turning away boats filled with migrants. From a remove, this looks cold-hearted — a nation built by immigrants showing no compassion for others who want a better life. But it is precisely because Australia is an immigrant nation that it understands the situation: if you let the boats land, more people come. People traffickers will be encouraged, migrants will be swindled, and their bodies will wash up on your shores. Any country serious about immigration needs a more effective and robust approach.

Tony Abbott, the former Prime Minister of Australia, made that point clearly this week on a trip to London. Delivering the Margaret Thatcher lecture at the Guildhall, Abbott, who left office in September, explained what so few European policymakers seem able to grasp. Yes, the rich world has a moral duty to help people fleeing for their lives. But that duty requires tough action — as well as targeted help — to prevent a genuine flow of refugees developing into an uncontrolled flood of migrants.

It was one of Abbott's predecessors, John Howard, who in 2001 faced the decision of what to do about a Norwegian freighter which had entered Australian waters with many Afghan asylum-seekers on board. He turned the boat away on the grounds that, while they may have begun their journey as refugees, they had transmuted into economic migrants. It is not possible to make a surface journey from Afghanistan to Australia without passing through the territory of several safe countries on the way. The ship had called at several ports in countries that were not at war and where the Afghans would not have faced persecution. Why had they not disembarked before reaching Australia?

The answer, of course, is that they believed Australia would offer them the best

chance of a more prosperous life. This is the very impulse that created modern Australia, Canada and the United States.

But Howard and Abbott were right to insist that the world has changed since those times. The migration crisis today is not due to an outbreak of war and poverty: we're living in an unprecedented era of peace and prosperity. In fact, this is what is driving the migration — people who had been too poor to consider emigrating now have enough cash to make the journey. They have smartphones, and know about life abroad. The sheer speed at which global poverty is being reduced has put millions on the move.

The EU was right to set up search and rescue in the Med, but the passengers should have been returned home

Study after study shows that emigration starts in earnest when very poor countries grow richer; it only stops when countries are rich enough not to be classified as 'poor'. This process typically takes a couple of generations. So the wave of migration we are witnessing in Europe is not just a response to the Syrian war; it is a phenomenon that will be with us for decades.

With migrant boats landing from North Africa, European countries could have learned lessons from the Australian experience. Instead, they have flapped around making things worse. The EU was right to set up search and rescue missions for migrants in danger of drowning in the Mediterranean — but the passengers should have been returned to whence they came and the traffickers prosecuted.

Nothing demonstrates the muddle better than the bizarre behaviour of Germany over the summer. Angela Merkel at first welcomed the migrants with open arms and

suggested that countries which took a more reluctant approach, such as Britain, lacked a moral compass. But Germany does not now resemble the warm-hearted country that Merkel wants to present to the world. Tensions are rising, as Hans Kundnani points out on page 12. The influx has reactivated neo-Nazi groups, with vigilantes patrolling migrant areas. As a leaked paper from German security agencies revealed this week, the government fears that it is importing anti-Semitism along with its migrant population.

Dramatic though the scenes are at Munich railway station and the Eurotunnel terminal at Calais, these are mere sideshows compared with the refugee issue as a whole. The country with the most Syrian refugees at present is not Britain, Germany or France. It is not even Turkey or the Lebanon. It is Syria. According to the United Nations, there are 6.5 million people displaced within their own country. A further 2.1 million are living in Turkey and 1.1 million in the Lebanon. Disgracefully, the UN's World Food Programme has had to cut rations for refugees living in camps around the Syrian border, for want of donations from rich countries. David Cameron's approach has been right and fair: focus on helping people in the places where they most need help, and don't make British residency a gleaming reward for people traffickers to dangle before their desperate clients.

European countries and the EU itself have enormous aid budgets which have been spent on fripperies such as low-carbon energy projects in sub-Saharan Africa. It is about time Europe spent more of this money on dealing with humanitarian crises where they arise — while simultaneously adopting an Australian robustness when it comes to border protection. As Europe is finding to its horror, the alternative is anything but compassionate.



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Martin Amis once said that, of all the literary pursuits, journalism was easily the easiest. Odd, then, that he is not very good at it
Rod Liddle, p17

As the plane prepared to land, Willie Rushton saw Frost, who was obviously anticipating a press reception, consulting a little notebook entitled 'Airport Quips'
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CONTRIBUTORS

Barry Humphries is the creator of Sir Les Patterson and Dame Edna Everage; his diary is on p. 9

Mario Reading's books include two John Hart novels, *The Templar Prophecy* and *The Templar Inheritance*, and *The Watkins Dictionary of Dreams*. He writes about living with cancer on p. 20.

Andrew Lycett, who reviews a biography of John le Carré on p.34, is the biographer of Ian Fleming, Wilkie Collins and Arthur Conan Doyle.

A.N. Wilson's memoir *Iris Murdoch as I Knew Her* was published in 2003. He considers Murdoch's letters on p. 40.

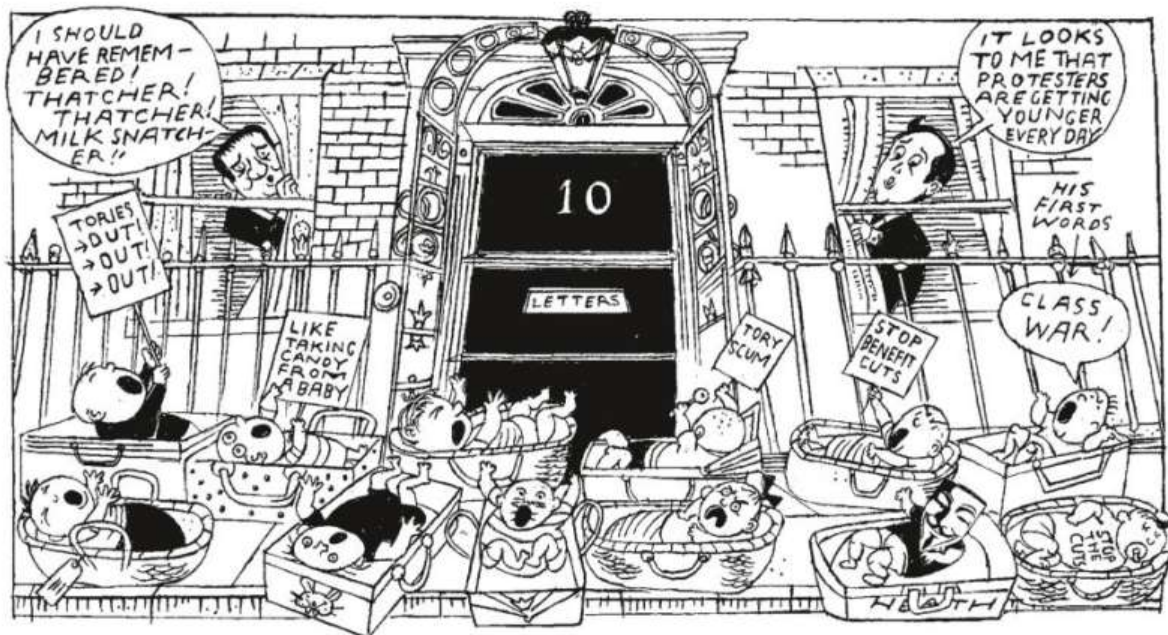
Michela Wrong's recent debut novel, *Borderlines*, is a courtroom drama set in Africa. She reviews a biography of Haile Selassie on p. 42.

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PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



Home

After it was twice defeated in the Lords on its plans to reduce working tax credits, the government announced a review of the workings of Parliament, to be led by Lord Strathclyde, the former leader of the House of Lords. Peers had voted for a motion by Lady Hollis of Heigham to delay the measures until the introduction of 'full transitional protection' for those who would suffer loss, and for a motion by Lady Meacher to delay them until the government had responded to an analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. The IFS had said that three million working families would be on average £1,300 a year worse off. George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, blamed the Lords for breaching a convention by defeating 'a financial matter passed by the elected House of Commons'. He said he would return to the matter in the autumn statement on 25 November. Michael Meacher, the Labour MP, who had been married to Lady Meacher from 1962 to 1987, died, aged 75.

David Cameron, the Prime Minister, visited Iceland in order to say that arrangements there and in Norway to trade with the European Union, but remain outside it, would not suit Britain. TalkTalk, the telecommunications company, told its four million current customers that their data might have been stolen in a cyber attack; police investigating the incident arrested a 15-year-old boy in Co. Antrim. More than 2,000 staff are to sue Morrisons, the supermarket, after personal and financial details were posted

online; Morrisons denied it was responsible. The British economy grew by 0.5 per cent between July and September, a slower rate than the 0.7 per cent growth of the second quarter of 2015. A conjunction of Venus, Jupiter and Mars was visible.

Tony Blair, the former prime minister, spoke about responsibility for the Iraq war in an interview with CNN. 'I apologise for the fact that the intelligence we received was wrong. I also apologise for some of the mistakes in planning,' he said. 'I find it hard to apologise for removing Saddam.' Saudi Arabia 'will not be lectured to by anyone' and trade links with Britain were 'going to be at risk' if they were made 'subordinate to certain political ideologies' said Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf bin Abdulaziz, the ambassador of Saudi Arabia, in an article for the *Daily Telegraph*. Lisa Jardine, the popular historian, died, aged 71.

Abroad

Leaders from eight EU countries (Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia) and two outside the EU (Macedonia and Serbia) met to address the migrant crisis. Miro Cerar, the Prime Minister of Slovenia, said: 'If we do not deliver some immediate and concrete actions on the ground in the next few days and weeks I believe the EU and Europe as a whole will start falling apart.' For the past week, migrants had been arriving in Greece at a rate of 9,000 a day. Turkish forces shelled positions in northern Syria held by the Kurdish People's Protection Units, an ally of the United

States against the Islamic State. An art installation at the Museion Bozen-Bolzano in Italy, consisting of empty champagne bottles, cigarette ends and party-popper streamers, was tidied away by a cleaner into rubbish sacks for glass, plastic and paper.

In Poland, the Law and Justice party, which is conservative and Eurosceptic, won the general election. In Portugal, the president invited Pedro Passos Coelho, the previous prime minister, to attempt to form a minority government, rather than the left bloc of communists and anti-austerity MPs. Jimmy Morales, a television comedian with no experience in government, was elected President of Guatemala. Data roaming charges for mobile phones in the EU will be abolished from 2017, after a vote in the European Parliament. Maureen O'Hara, the film star, died, aged 95. Ireland introduced a 'voluntary national rounding scheme' to adjust prices to the nearest five cents and do away with cent and two-cent coins.

Two bombs in north-eastern Nigeria blamed on Boko Haram killed at least 42 people. An American naval vessel passed close to Subi and Mischief, two reefs in the Spratly Islands that China had turned into islands and laid territorial claim to. Five people drowned when a whale-watching boat with 27 aboard suddenly sank off Vancouver Island in Canada. In the United States, Walmart offered as a Halloween outfit for children an 'Israeli soldier costume'. A food analysis laboratory in America found human DNA in 2 per cent of the hot dogs it sampled.

CSH

Think- ing allowed

Dispatches

Britain's Benefits Experiment
Monday 8pm



DIARY

Barry Humphries



I'm counting 'Wows!' Suddenly everyone is using this irritating expletive expressing incredulity, amazement and nothing at all. I've heard it from the lips of daughters in law, professors of literature, rabbis and housewives. No doubt at least one priest has said it after a particularly lurid confession. It is spreading like leprosy over ordinary discourse and will, in time, die out like 'Zounds' or 'Gee whizz'. I wonder if it will turn up as an anachronism in *Downton Abbey*? I saw on television the other night a superb production of Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* with great performances from David Thewlis, Ken Stott and Miranda Richardson. The adaptation was impeccable and no one said 'Wow!' but there was a jarring moment when one actor referred to 'the bottom line', briefly wrenching me back into the present.

Another star-studded celebration of Oscar Wilde (his birthday) at the Langham Hotel, hosted by Gyles Brandreth and Oscar's grandson Merlin Holland. Some ignorant malapert said in the *Observer* the other day that Wilde never wrote anything when he came out of the slammer. What about *De Profundis* and the post-vinicular *Ballad of Reading Gaol*? And what about his voluminous discarnate witticisms, many dictated in automatic writing to Mrs Hester Travers Smith, the distinguished medium. 'Being dead is the most boring experience in life, if, that is, one excepts being married or dining with a schoolmaster.'

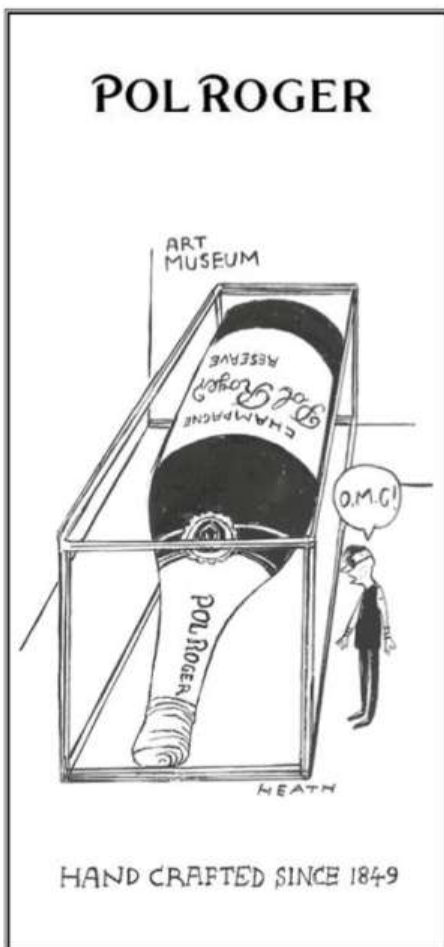
I've lately fallen into the habit of chewing the right corner of my lower lip in moments of scepticism. I know why I do it. It's an unconscious homage to that great actor Michael Kitchen, who invented this mannerism for his flawless impersonation of Christopher Foyle in my favourite TV show. I've watched *Foyle's War* countless times and my admiration for the writer Anthony Horowitz, Mr Kitchen, glorious Honeysuckle Weeks and their satellites continues to grow. John Betjeman would certainly have worshipped Sam in her ATS uniform and lyle stockings. If Hester Travis Smith was still with us, I'm sure that Betjeman would send her Ouija board spinning at the mere whiff of Honeysuckle.

Other shows I enjoy late at night on my new TV set are *Murder, She Wrote* and *The Professionals*, the latter for its pacey, modern camerawork and its glimpses of old London in the far-off 1970s, when phones rang and characters picked up cordless handsets the size of small cars. Angela Lansbury's wonderful series set in Cabot Cove — surely the murder capital of the world — is riveting, not just because one can never get enough of Angela Lansbury, but because all the male characters have

terrible wigs and the women have hair and shoulders that fill the screen. Some of these late-night diversions have, for me, a certain poignancy as I count the few cast members who are still alive.

Last weekend I was in Nice with Jennifer Saunders and Joanna Lumley for their new *Ab Fab* movie. I played a small but striking role as the sleazy old boyfriend of Patsy at a pool party festooned with Russian babes. My usual theatrical work is rather solitary, so this was a heart-warming tonic. Later, gorgeous Miss Lumley and I dined in a modest bistro, but I noticed a middle-aged couple at a nearby table were staring rather hard at my companion. 'ENT,' I whispered across the table. It was my mother's customary acronym when, during my early schooldays, she took me to one of her ladies' luncheons in a Melbourne tea shop and noticed a rather conspicuously dressed couple at a nearby table: the woman rather loud and toothy, the man in mustard-coloured corduroy trousers, suede shoes and houndstooth jacket with un-Australian side vents. 'ENT,' English Next Table. Sure enough the star of *Absolutely Fabulous* had been clocked by a British tourist. 'I'm so sorry to interrupt your privacy,' he said, husky with reticence. He then politely expressed his admiration for several of Miss Lumley's achievements; compliments she received with her habitual grace. Oddly enough, I went unrecognised, although on reflection the nice man from Ealing might have been too awestruck to accost me.

On the Côte d'Azur the dead have the best views; it made me think of Gstaad, where the best aspect of the valley is from a hostel for the blind. I drove over to Menton yesterday and climbed the hill to the cemetery to pay my respects at the tombs of Aubrey Beardsley and Katherine Mansfield. A night off last Saturday in the restaurant at the Negresco in Nice, a marvellous belle époque hotel which, alas, has been expensively 'reimagined' by a colourblind decorator and kitsch-meister and been utterly ruined. 'Vulgarity is the rich man's modest contribution to democracy,' posthumously quipped Oscar Wilde to Mrs Travers Smith in 1928. Wow!



Lords of misrule

A few days after the general election, I bumped into one of David Cameron's longest-standing political allies, one of those who had helped him get selected for Witney back in 2000. I remarked that he must be delighted that Cameron had now won a majority. To my surprise, he glumly replied that it would only be significant if Cameron were to create a hundred new peers. Without them, he warned, the government's most important measures would end up bogged down in the Lords, where Labour and the Liberal Democrats combined comfortably outnumber the Tories.

Now, normally when people urge the Prime Minister to create new peers it is because they hope that they will be on the list themselves. But this source was one of those rare Westminster beasts with no interest in a peerage and his fear is now being borne out. Since May, the government has lost more than 70 per cent of votes in the Lords. Just this week, the upper house has rejected plans for tax-credit reform even though it normally defers to the elected house where tax is concerned. A week earlier, the Lords decided that they understood what was in the Tory manifesto better than the Tories and defeated the government over subsidies to onshore windfarms. This happened in spite of the Salisbury Convention, which says that the Lords shouldn't block manifesto commitments.

What is striking about the Lords' behaviour is the eagerness with which they are picking fights with the government and the elected house. There is little the Tories can do to stop losing votes there. For Monday's vote they turned out more of their peers than they have for a decade, and still lost. The frequency of these defeats is causing increasing irritation in Downing Street. One senior No. 10 figure fumes that Labour and the Liberal Democrats are 'treating the revising chamber as a legislative chamber'.

Traditionally, peers have been wary of full-blown confrontation with the government because they know that their legitimacy is questionable and they have no desire to spark a debate about whether or not the Lords should be abolished. But this has changed since May. The Liberal Democrat peers, of whom there are more than a hundred, don't much care if they bring the whole place down. They regard the Lords as an absurd anachronism and are therefore happy to heighten the contradictions of

having an unelected chamber in a 21st-century parliament. These Lib Dem peers have been radicalised by the general election result. They feel that their party was taken for a ride by the Tories, who lured them into government and then destroyed them, and are determined to have their vengeance by whatever means possible.

Their behaviour is having a knock-on effect on Labour, who don't want to be outflanked as the left-wing opposition to the Tories. There is also the Corbyn factor. When Jeremy Corbyn was elected Labour leader, the Tories hoped this would reduce their problem in the Lords. They believed that Labour peers appointed by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown would have little time for a

The Lib Dem peers, more than a hundred of them, don't much care if they bring the whole place down

leader from the hard left who had been such a thorn in New Labour's side. But Labour peers have reacted rather differently to their new leader. The party's travails in the Commons have made many of them feel that it is now their job to oppose the government. And there is no doubt that the Lords have been emboldened on tax credits by the sense that public opinion is on their side.

The issue of peer pressure is not going to go away. There's little confidence in Tory circles that the government's record on winning votes will improve. One of those involved in working out how to get legislation through the upper house says, despairingly: 'I now assume we are going to lose every big vote down there.' Short of flood-

ing the place with new peers, it is hard to see what the short-term solution is. (I understand that the option of appointing a few dozen more peers has not been taken off the table, though Cameron is averse to such a move by temperament.) Indeed, inside government there is concern that if they talk too tough on Lords reform, they might have to do something dramatic and that could lead to a full-blown confrontation with the upper house, leading to legislative gridlock. The current government review into the Lords is as much about providing covering fire while Osborne works on a solution to his tax credit problem as it is about addressing any constitutional question.

In the medium term, part of the answer to getting the Lords to respect the will of the Commons must be more frankness from parties about what they intend to do if they gain office. If the Tories had a clearer mandate for what they are doing to tax credits, more peers would have had reservations about blocking the government's agenda.

Meanwhile, Osborne has to prepare for next month's autumn statement. His allies say that he will find some ways of softening the impact of the cuts but that he won't draw back from the reform. The view in Downing Street is that there is 'something structurally wrong with our economy' which leads to welfare being so high and wages so low and that changing tax credits is the key to fixing that imbalance. It is certain is that Osborne's tweaks to the tax credits package won't be the ones peers voted for; the government is determined not to let the Lords dictate the terms of their surrender.

His supporters believe that, with a few changes, these tax credit reforms can pass and will come to be accepted by the electorate. They point out the way he tweaked the benefits cap with the introduction of a discretionary fund for local authorities, and the removal of child benefit from higher-rate taxpayers by means of a taper, and that both measures now enjoy widespread support.

The bigger challenge for the government, however, is to turn the national conversation back on to the importance of dealing with the deficit. The public will accept tough measures such as tax-credit reform only if they believe that balancing the books is imperative and that there is no alternative.



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THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

An enjoyable aspect of parliamentary rules and conventions is that almost no one understands them. This has become acutely true in an age when the media no longer regularly reports proceedings in Parliament. So when the House of Lords threatened to derail the government tax credit cuts this week, no one, that I spotted, foresaw what actually happened. Knowing that the measure came forward as a statutory instrument, not a Bill, and was therefore (in both Houses) unamendable, its opponents in the Lords voted not to reject it but to delay considering it. They set conditions which had to be met before they would do so. Thus they defied the government without flatly breaking the conventions, which was clever, and unpredicted. The saga shows what advantage accrues to those few, in either House, who bother to study the rules and exploit them. Before 'family-friendly' hours destroyed the proper scrutiny of legislation in the Commons, this mastery of procedural powers of delay was the main weapon of opposition. The Lords were wrong to go so far in this particular case, but it is good to see a revival of the old crafts. As part of its exciting commitment to diversity, the government should find a couple of people on its own side who know how Parliament works.

There is a row because the new edition of the ministerial code has removed explicit mention of the duty of ministers to conform to international law. Some will feel relief that the will of our own parliament is given greater prominence, and less deference is shown to those seeking to rule the world through universal and undemocratic legal doctrines, but one cannot blame 'human rights' lawyers for getting hot under their gowns. What did slightly shock me, however, was a letter in the *Guardian* from Sir Paul Jenkins, who was, until recently, the Treasury solicitor. 'As the government's most senior legal official,' he wrote, 'I saw at first hand ... the intense irritation these words [about international law] caused the PM as he sought to avoid complying with international obligations, for example in relation to prisoner voting. Whether the



new wording alters the legal obligations of ministers ... there can be no doubt that they will regard the change as bolstering ... their contempt for international law.' Is there no code for government legal advisers, since we are talking about codes, which tells them that they should not reveal what ministers said to them when they held their posts, or make hostile public comment on what they believe they saw? I have met Sir Paul, an amusing man who is said to have been good at his job. Now he undermines his good work by revealing himself, as an adviser never should, as a political antagonist of the people he advised. His letter is another example of the extraordinary disdain now openly expressed by modern lawyers for elected governments. The rule of law is being usurped by the rule of lawyers.

In this column last week, I mistakenly attributed to Louis MacNeice lines which were written by William Empson. When your memory strongly tells you something is right, always check. I didn't. I'm sorry.

In the same column, I also mentioned how boarding-school pupils put expensive items on their parents' bill (and sometimes buy them their Christmas presents in this way). I hear of an extreme recent example, suffered by a friend. His son went to southern Africa on a school trip, and there shot an impala and a wildebeest. Without warning, the extras on the bill at the end of term included the cost of taxidermy and delivering the heads — in the region of £600.

My much-loved uncle, Norman Moore, died last week, aged 92. He was an extremely distinguished conservationist, a pioneer in discovering the effect the damage that DDT was doing to birds. He was also a classic example of how the

child is father of the man. His mother kept notes of the early remarks of her children, and all strongly foreshadowed their interests in later life. Saying his prayers at night, the very young Norman, instead of 'Make Norman a good boy', said, 'Make Norman a good anteater'. He also noted that the sky one day was 'the colour of cygnets'. When he heard how Jesus had walked upon the water, he reassured himself with the thought that the 'stinging fish' would not sting him 'because they knew him'.

One of the best of P.G. Wodehouse's works is *The Inimitable Jeeves*, which I have recently re-read. In order to impress his friend Bingo Little's rich uncle, Lord Bittlesham, Bertie Wooster has to pretend that he is the romantic novelist Rosie M. Banks, whose writing Bittlesham greatly admires. The trick succeeds. Eventually, when Bingo wishes to marry a waitress without being cut out of his uncle's money, he begs Bertie to go and plead with Lord Bittlesham on his behalf. He advises him to 'start off by sending the old boy an autographed copy of your latest effort with a flattering inscription'. 'What is my latest?' asks Bertie, who is unfamiliar with the oeuvre whose authorship he claims. 'The Woman Who Braved All', said young Bingo, '... The shop windows are full of nothing but it. It looks to me from the picture on the jacket the sort of book any chappie would be proud to have written.' It is indeed an excellent title. I wish I had thought of it when I embarked on my authorised biography of Margaret Thatcher. Perhaps I could use it as the overarching name for all three volumes.

An opencast coal mine belonging to the great writer and climate sceptic Matt Ridley was shut down for most of Monday by protestors who chained themselves to a mechanical digger and proclaimed that, by allowing the extraction of 'the world's dirtiest fossil fuel', Lord Ridley was 'cooking the planet'. So it has come to this, that left-wing agitators who, if they had been alive in the 1980s, would all have worn 'Coal not Dole' badges, now attack a viscount for supporting the miners.

Germany's dark night of the soul

The migrant crisis is testing the country's post-war idea of itself

HANS KUNDNANI

As Angela Merkel approaches her tenth anniversary in power, Germans are talking about a possible *Kanzlerinnendämmerung* — a 'twilight of the chancellors'. Anger is growing at Merkel's handling of the migration crisis. Germany, which has only recently reconciled itself to the idea that it is a 'country of immigration', must now integrate vast numbers of asylum seekers, beginning with the million who are expected to arrive this year. At the same time, the country has been hit by two huge corruption scandals, involving Volkswagen and the DFB, the German football federation. The odds are that Merkel will survive — it's hard to see at the moment who can replace her. But the unprecedented challenges she now faces threaten something more fundamental: Germany's post-war identity.

Germans like to believe that they have moved beyond nationhood in the classical sense; that they have developed a post-national identity based on 'constitutional patriotism'. In other words, Germany has developed a civic (as opposed to ethnic) nationalism based on a liberal political culture and embodied in the Basic Law, the Federal Republic's constitution.

This identity was in large part informed by a sense of responsibility and contrition for the Nazi past and the Holocaust. As the leading advocate of the idea of 'constitutional patriotism', the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, once wrote: 'In Germany it was only after Auschwitz — and in a sense only because of the shock of this moral catastrophe — that democracy began to take root.' This implied that there was no sense of national identity available to Germany other than one based on the lessons of 1945.

In reality, German post-war identity is more complex than this account allows. For a long time the embryonic 'post-nationalism' that developed in the Federal Republic from the 1960s onwards co-existed uneasily with a rather regressive citizenship law based on the principle of *ius sanguinis*, or 'citizenship by blood', which went back to 1913. Until the law was reformed by Gerhard

Schröder's 'red-green' government in 2000, Germany continued to define itself in ethnic terms. Even second- or third-generation Turkish immigrants were officially 'foreigners'. It has only been during the last decade or so that Germany has come around to the idea that it is a multi-ethnic society — and many Germans are still uneasy about that

background of the post-war *Wirtschaftswunder*, or 'economic miracle', the Mercedes symbol had replaced the Iron Cross as a symbol of German national pride. Habermas also argued that, in the absence of alternative sources of national identity, a kind of economic nationalism had developed in Germany. For him, however, the symbol of 'the new confidence of an economically successful nation' was not automobiles but the Federal Republic's currency — a phenomenon he called 'Deutsche mark nationalism'.

Habermas wrote that essay in 1990. Soon after, what he saw as the new symbol of Germany identity was removed by the decision to replace the Deutsche mark with the euro. For a decade, Germany also struggled with the costs of reunifying east and west. But the German economy recovered and has become even more dependent on exports: according to the World Bank, exports grew as a share of GDP from 29 per cent in 1999 to 51 per cent in 2013. Many, including Merkel, refer to Germany as an 'export nation' — a term that suggests that exports are central not just to the German economy but also to national identity itself. If Habermas was right that the Deutsche mark had by 1990 become the most important symbol of German national identity, it now seems to have been replaced by exports — what I have called 'export nationalism'.

While intellectuals identified with the idea of a 'post-national' identity or what has even been called a 'Holocaust identity', ordinary Germans instead took pride in the extraordinary economic success of the Federal Republic. The tension between these two versions of German post-war identity was expressed most clearly in the statement allegedly made by the Bavarian Christian Democrat leader Franz Josef Strauss, that 'a people that has achieved the economic success that we have has a right to hear nothing more about Auschwitz'.

In this context, Merkel's problems take on greater significance. The migration crisis is clearly the biggest and most important. When the scale of the influx of asylum seekers to Germany became apparent in Sep-



idea, as shown by the sudden emergence of the anti-immigrant movement Pegida. Germany is post-national more in theory than in practice.

Moreover, from the creation of the Federal Republic onwards, the pride in their country that many citizens felt often came not from the German constitution or from dealing with the Nazi past, but from economic success. In his 2008 book on German myth, *Mythen der Deutschen*, the political scientist Herfried Münkler wrote that, against the

tember, Merkel told the German public: 'We can do it!'

In effect, she was betting on Germany's post-national identity — to which Germany's relatively liberal asylum law, based on Article 16 of the Basic Law, has always been central. Merkel has long been perceived as adopting popular Social Democrat or Green policies, particularly on social and environmental issues, as a way of occupying the centre ground of German politics. Her apparent determination to integrate vast numbers of asylum seekers into German society won her new supporters on the left.

However, while Merkel's supporters see her approach to the migration crisis as bold, her critics — mainly on the right — see it as reckless. There has already been an angry backlash from voters, and that could increase. Since the crisis began, the Eurosceptic and increasingly xenophobic Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), which had seemed to be falling apart after its founder, Bernd Lucke, left to form a new party in July, has been rising in the polls again. Mean-

In the popular imagination, the 2006 World Cup was when the new multi-ethnic Germany came into being

while attacks on asylum seekers have taken place on an almost daily basis.

The resurgence of the AfD and the increasing frequency of attacks on asylum seekers illustrates how fragile Germany's sense of identity remains. The Germans who turn up to show that they welcome asylum seekers usually outnumber those on the far right. But the danger remains that, by overreaching in response to the crisis, Merkel may discredit the idea of Germany as an 'immigration country' just as ordinary Germans were reconciling themselves to it.

This is also the significance of the football scandal. The 2006 World Cup was the moment when, in the popular imagination, the new multi-ethnic Germany came into being. For many Germans, especially on the left, what became known as the *Sommermärchen*, or 'summer fairy tale' (a play on Heinrich Heine's 19th-century epic poem *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen*), was an important symbol — in a sense, the moment when the post-national identity became real. But *Der Spiegel's* recent allegations that the DFB created a slush fund and paid kickbacks to Fifa officials in order to secure the World Cup have retrospectively tainted that moment. Many Germans now see the *Sommermärchen* itself as a fairy tale — a *Sommermärchenmärchen*. A great moment of German pride has been soured.

Meanwhile, the Volkswagen scandal threatens Germany's identity as an export nation. Over the last decade, Germans have increasingly seen their export-driven economic success as a model for others — indeed, much of the response to the euro

Bone Scanning

Perhaps like Superman I will see through walls
now that I've tanked up on isotopes
lighting bruise-blue veins and sparking neon
from suspect bones

the camera, smoochy as a lover
will map out the secret places where
little bumpy evils lurk
jigsawing until I am like a find in a dig

and there it is, the whole of me in middle-age
nothing for a lover to caress
a Hallowe'en thing with the ugly quiet
of the dead. Give this clatter

of razor-white calcium a name
even as its anonymity claims its non-identity
a figure polished up from a mass grave
a chip in the skull where the bullet went in

not a movement or the image will blur
as if a spirit wrestled its way out of the frame
call it a soul, if you will, it won't matter
I am my own atrocity, I know that now.

— Fred Johnston

crisis has been an attempt to reshape other eurozone economies along German lines. But precisely because automobiles were the symbol of Germany's *Exportstärke*, or export strength, the revelations that Volkswagen cheated on emissions tests in the United States has tainted the success of German exports.

The scandal also broke at a time when other developments, such as the economic slowdown in China, had already illustrated the fragility of Germany's export-dependent growth model. In short, Germany's export success looks less sustainable than before.

Despite this series of questions surrounding Germany's sense of national identity,



'I'm a cyber-philanthropist — I hack into people's accounts and clear their overdrafts.'

Merkel is likely to survive for the time being. Much of the criticism of her has come from the right wing of her own party, the Christian Democrats, rather than the Social Democrats, her compliant coalition partner. But it remains hard to imagine the most plausible challenger, the 73-year-old finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble, deposing her. Merkel will probably make further concessions to her right-wing critics, and move on.

However, the extraordinary consensus which centred on Merkel and which has dominated German politics over the last decade seems to be unravelling. That consensus, around a synthesis of centre-right economic policies and centre-left social and environmental policies, was based on the idea of Germany being a country of immigrants, as well as an export nation. As the challenges that Merkel now faces put this sense of identity under increasing pressure, German politics may be about to become more contested and unpredictable, though this may be no bad thing for Europe. When the Merkel era does finally come to an end, it is not at all clear what kind of country she will leave behind.

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Killer facts

The World Health Organisation added processed meats to its list of 'known' carcinogens. A few of the other things which have been claimed to be linked to cancer in the past fortnight:

- Make-up in Halloween outfits (blamed by a laser surgery centre in New York)
- Chocolate (blamed by a colorectal surgeon at St George's Hospital, Tooting)
- Deodorants (tabloid article — no source given)
- Hormone-replacement therapy (tabloid article — no source given)
- 'Roundup' herbicide (named in US lawsuit)
- Sand used in fracking, which is to say, sand (Friends of the Earth)
- Nail polish (tabloid article — no source given)
- Shampoo (US gynaecologist)

Sweet surrender

Who would pay the most sugar tax?

Daily sugar intake in grams

Male manual workers	113g
Male non-manual	95.2g
Female manual	76.9g
Female non-manual	73g

Source: Scottish Heart Study

Bubbling up

English wine production was said to be on course to break another record. How has it fared in recent years?

2014	6.3m bottles
2013	4.45m bottles
2012	1.03m bottles
2011	3.02m bottles
2010	4.05m bottles
2009	3.18m bottles

Halls of fame

Plans will shortly be announced for a new concert hall at the Barbican. Who has the largest regular classical music venues?

LDS Conference Centre, Salt Lake City, Utah (home of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir)	21,000 seats
Elliot Hall of Music, West Lafayette, Indiana	6,005 seats
Royal Albert Hall	5,500 seats
Saratoga Performing Arts Centre, New York	5,100 seats
Koussevitzky Music Shed, Tanglewood, Massachusetts ...	5,100 seats
Odeon of Herodes Atticus, Athens (open air)	5,000 seats
Sala Palatului, Bucharest	4,000 seats
Metropolitan Opera House, New York	3,900 seats

Forty is a feminist issue

For older women, the battle for equality is far from won

MELISSA KITE

If Emily Hill is right in her cover piece for the magazine last week headlined 'The end of feminism', then women like me are in a whole world of trouble. And by women like me, I mean women over 40.

The nub of Ms Hill's argument was that all the big battles are won. She quoted the sparkling achievements of 'women in their twenties' and also 'the under-40s', who are out-earning men. What happens to women after they have broken through the glass ceiling is a question for an older, more cynical female writer. At your service.

While agreeing with a lot of what Ms Hill says about the pettiness of today's Twitter feminism, it is important to draw attention to the paragraph in which she reveals her birth year (1983) and to note that articles declaring feminism void are usually written by women in their thirties or younger. 'Give her ten years,' I found myself thinking wistfully.

Looking back on my twenties and thirties, I believed equality to be like water, flowing freely and without end. I don't mean to claim that when I turned 40 I instantly began to suffer discrimination, but rather that a sense settled upon me that the inalienable rights I once held to be self-evident were looking a bit conditional. There was a shocking moment when I realised that all women had a sell-by date, not necessarily linked to their ability to perform. It was in 2009, when the BBC sacked Arlene Phillips from *Strictly Come Dancing*, to be replaced by a younger model, while Len Goodman and Bruce Forsyth blathered on.

It was like Jenny Agutter finding out that 'carrousel' isn't a ceremony leading to eternal life, but vaporisation. When Arlene was singled out for *Logan's Run*-style renewal — complete with a chillingly cheerful interview in which she insisted she was happy to be pursuing other projects — I realised I would not necessarily find the same equality of opportunity in the second half of my life as the first.

If Arlene could be sent to 'carrousel', we could all go. Darcey Bussell should know that her tenure on *Strictly* is about as assured as her ability to ward off eye bags. I haven't watched the show since Arlene's vaporisation — my slightly forlorn bra-burner protest at 'sexagism', of which there have been other high-profile examples. Former BBC presenter Miriam O'Reilly won her discrim-

ination battle for being one of four middle-aged women dropped from *Countryfile*.

But such cases get treated as ageism, not sexism, so they are not championed by feminists. We need to label ageism what it really is — a scourge largely suffered by women and the last stand of misogyny. It is not remotely acceptable that being born a woman means you are less likely to be allowed to do what you are good at for as long as if you had been born a man. It means that we have not yet been fully delivered from the centuries-old premise that we must attract a man or face destitution. And yet we declare feminism dead, as if there is no battle left to fight?

Well, some of us do. The young will argue that feminism is an ex-philosophy, has ceased

The BBC sacked Arlene Phillips from Strictly while Len Goodman and Bruce Forsyth blathered on

to be, because they don't need it. Those of us sweating it out in mid-life, meanwhile, insist that feminism is a remarkable bird with beautiful plumage. In this era of longer life expectancy, the notion that equality lasts only as long as sexual attractiveness, that female opportunity is pegged to fertility, should be the biggest feminist battle of our age.

That it is not, and that women are having pointless semantic Twitter spats, is a betrayal of what braver souls chained themselves to railings for. The petty internet trolling of men who so much as squeak a non-PC term; the constant demand for heads to roll simply for voicing an opinion about rape, or transgender issues... all this is deeply unedifying behaviour for a movement which once fought for the universal right to have an opinion. Female campaigners do themselves no favours by being so ludicrously censorious. But just because feminism is fighting the wrong battles does not mean it should shut up shop. Actually, I think younger women do realise subconsciously that their physical attractiveness is going to be a problem — but they don't quite nail it.

Hence, they alight on the wrong end of the issue and cut up rough when a man compliments them. Instead of saying: 'How dare he call me stunning on LinkedIn,' the budding twentysomething feminist might ask: 'I wonder what is happening to women who aren't being called stunning on LinkedIn.'

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The hatred that Amis and Corbyn share



Everyone loves an underdog. It doesn't matter how incompetent they might be — indeed, incompetence works in their favour. You do not expect underdogs to be adept, do you? It doesn't really matter how vile, otiose or absurd their beliefs are, either. So long as they are up against someone more powerful, a certain sentimental section of the population will be rooting for them. Look at the Palestinians, for example. And look at Jeremy Bloody Corbyn.

My wife — a Tory — said to me the other day: 'You lot want to watch it. I'm beginning to feel sorry for the bloke. The sympathy votes will be stacking up.' We had been listening to some deposed Labour grandee laying into Jezza for his witless, virtue-signalling lapel-badge politics, his managerial ineptitude, his beard, his dress sense, perhaps even the whiff of his breath — lentils stewed in an Irish peat bog for interminable hours — his pre-teen internationalism and his utter estrangement from the electorate.

I was cheering along and agreed with every point. But there is so much to have a go at with Corbyn that in the end it sounds like overkill, like breaking if not a butterfly, then a really crap moth — one of those tiny brown micro-moths even the lepidopterists get bored by — on a wheel. You can feel, when these fusillades rain down, the audience shifting uneasily and the weight of allegiance drifting towards the dull, the stultifyingly dull Marxist idiot. It does not matter how accurate the barbs may be; simply that there are too many of them, one after the other until it becomes a barbarism. And the public, or some of it, thinks well hell, if he can arouse this level of animosity, then he can't be all bad. Such fury and contempt — maybe, then, he has a point. And they think this even if he doesn't actually have a point, even if the 'new politics' is merely an amalgam of late 1970s radical chic idiocy and the aforementioned incompetence.

I worried about this when reading a lengthy piece eviscerating Corbyn in a newspaper for which I also work, the *Sunday Times*. It was written by Martin Amis — for me one of the most powerful novelists this country has produced since the second world war. Behind J.G. Ballard and David Storey, I would reckon, but probably ahead of Doris

Lessing and Muriel Spark. He has not quite received the respect he deserves — from the awful prize-givers, the mimsy arts broadcasters, the literary hacks — perhaps for reasons of political correctness and one suspects that this grates upon the man, rightly enough. He is a far better novelist than his dad, I would suggest, and yet his dad hangs over him like a cackling black bat. Perhaps this why he decided to stop writing novels which were primarily 'funny' and instead got very earnest indeed, not always to good effect. Still, we should not carp when a talented writer tackles such subjects as the possible nuclear Armageddon and the Holocaust, even if his marks on both subjects (à la Kurt Vonnegut, who retrospectively gave his novels univer-

There is so much to have a go at with the Labour leader that it is like breaking a brown moth on a wheel

sity essay grades) are, respectively, C- and B+. That is what the best writers are there for — to deal with the big.

But I mean Amis as a novelist, not as a journalist. He once said that of all the literary pursuits, journalism was easily the easiest; odd, then, that he is not very good at it. His attack upon Corbyn began with a lengthy, hugely boring and ineffective trope about a cartoon cat, which may have lost many readers and almost lost me, a fan of the chap. The rest of it contained interesting and perceptive reminiscences of his time at the *New Statesman* in the late 1970s, where every other person was an 'Identikit Corbyn' and, as he puts it, 'weedy, nervy and thrifty', and the sensi-

ble people avoided them like the plague. The central attack on Jezza, though, was this: he is humourless (yes, tick; but I wonder how many other Amis fans thought a little wistfully that the same could not have been said about the younger Martin Amis), that he is possessed of a 'slow-minded rigidity' (yes, two ticks. Exactly the point) and — wait for it — that he is 'under-educated'.

And it is this last barb which is the problem. However louche and hip Amis may once have been, or still mistakenly thinks himself to be, he is a fastidious snob, and every bit as estranged from the average voter as Corbyn himself (not least as a consequence of living in New York, of course). Amis's novels, right from the very first, betray a terror of, and a distance from, the working class; for Amis the plebs are epitomised by the venal and thugish and stupid shop steward Stanley Veale, or the dart-obsessed Brobdingnagian Keith Talent, from *London Fields*. Or the whole heap of them who populate his more recent novel *Lionel Asbo* — which was actually better than the critics decreed and contained certain elements of that long-forgotten thing with Amis, humour. These characters are signifiers of a class which is base in its aspirations, unable to tell a hawk from a handsaw, or indeed tell you where that quote came from, and they are threatening to take over. The plebs, the untermensch, the workers.

He is not so very far from Corbyn, then, after all. The same disdain for a vast group of people, for their uncouth views and their lowbrow culture and their neanderthal political sensibilities. An echo of Orwell's patrician dismissal of the working class in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: 'Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious.' A moronic agglomeration of plumbers and roadsweepers and sparkies and terrifying chaps on building sites, all brain-dead to the world.

Too much, already. We should be pleased that one of our greatest novelists deigns to involve himself in politics, and delighted that a national newspaper deems this deigning worthy of publication. My suspicion is that in its upper-class snobbery, it will have flung another bunch of voters Jezza's way.

Lordy, we don't want that.



'White or rosé?'

ANCIENT AND MODERN

The emperors of Brussels



As both sides of the great EU debate line up their forces, it is worth reflecting on the implications of the collapse of the Roman republic in the 1st century BC and its transformation into an imperial system under the first emperor Augustus.

Romans dated the start of the collapse to 133 BC. Up till then, they felt that relations between the senate, the traditional, if *de facto*, ruling authority, and the Plebeian assembly, with its tribunes who could veto senatorial proposals, had worked pretty well, without any serious clashes. This all changed when the ambitious aristocrat Tiberius Gracchus got himself elected tribune in order to use the Plebeian assembly to introduce legislation without senatorial agreement. This was within the law, but the issue — the redistribution among the poor of technically illegal land-holdings of the wealthy — was highly contentious. That passed, but an associated proposal ended in a bloody riot, started by senators, and Tiberius was murdered. His brother Gaius suffered the same fate ten years later.

With the 'constitution' now in tatters, powerful dynasts, with money and private armies behind them — Marius, Sulla, Julius Caesar, Pompey — fought it out for power in a series of coups and civil wars. The last man standing in 31 BC was Octavian, the adopted son and heir of Caesar, and it was he who, as the first emperor Augustus, invented Rome's first standing army. With no obvious rivals and the military's backing, he restored order and the rule of (his) law to Rome. Historians like Tacitus saw it for what it was: authoritarian one-man rule.

The EU is hardly in the state of late republican Rome. But its central mission, universal economic integration, imposed at whatever cost on member states, has failed. So it proposes yet closer union. But further enforcing such chimerical ends threatens Europe with an even more centralised and undemocratic Augustanism. If that is where the EU is heading, it is time to wave it goodbye.

— Peter Jones

France's new reactionaries

The nation's intellectuals are being roiled by issues of immigration, sovereignty and freedom of expression

PATRICK MARNHAM

When President de Gaulle was asked to authorise the criminal prosecution of Jean-Paul Sartre for civil disobedience during the Algerian war, he declined. 'One does not lock up Voltaire,' he added, unhistorically. In France, 'public intellectuals' have a quasi-constitutional status, so it's not surprising that a furious bunfight has broken out over a handful of philosophers known as '*les nouveaux réactionnaires*'.

The new reactionaries do not see themselves as a group, but they defend a common point of view about the causes of France's diminishing status and influence. They look back on a golden age that started with the French revolution and continued for nearly 200 years as France — driven by the republican principles of freedom, equality, brotherhood and the rights of man, plus anti-clericalism — pursued its worldwide 'civilising mission'. Today the pressures of globalisation threaten France's identity and a nation that once imposed its vision on the world is having to swallow ideas the very opposite of those it has always preached. The importance of 'the French model' is drilled into the nation's schoolchildren daily. But in the view of these philosophers, 'Anglo-Saxon' political correctness ('*la bien-pensance*') has poisoned teacher-training courses, which have become 'gulags of knowledge'. The new reactionaries are convinced that one of the cornerstones of French culture, 'freedom of expression', is dying. They reject 'post-colonial guilt' and are appalled by 'cultural relativism'. To get down to the nitty-gritty, they take the view that France's sovereignty is under threat from Arab immigration. Europe's migration crisis has highlighted their fears, and the lip service that President Hollande pays to Angela Merkel's refugee-quota system — widely unpopular in France — has further aided the reactionaries' arguments.

A leading figure is the right-wing political journalist Éric Zemmour, who is Jewish and descended from *pieds noirs* (French citizens formerly living in the colony of Algeria). His book *Le Suicide français*, published last year, traces the decline of France since the death in 1970 of Charles de Gaulle and has enjoyed a huge success. Zemmour, who has in the past been prosecuted for racism, recently became a peak-time television star, taking the place of elected politicians whom he describes as

'destructive and out of touch'. This month, a novel written by one of his supporters depicts Zemmour as a future president of France. The conceit began to look less extravagant when a national opinion poll showed that 12 per cent of the electorate welcomed the possibility.

That Zemmour should hold reactionary opinions is not surprising. He was once an adviser to ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy and is now associated with the Front National. But he has been joined by Alain Finkielkraut, an established feature of the nation's political conversation for many years. Finkielkraut was until recently a professor at the École Polytechnique and is now a member of the Académie Française. In his recent book *L'Identité malheureuse* ('Unhappy Identity'), he too attacked multiculturalism and he points out that his father, a Jewish refugee

The ultimate cause of all this turmoil, Marine Le Pen of the Front National, is enjoying the spectacle

from Poland who became a French citizen, would never have told ethnic Frenchmen that he was 'as French as they were' — a refrain commonly heard from more recent immigrants. Finkielkraut defends the same point of view — despite the fact that his father was deported to Auschwitz by the wartime Pétain administration — and he is outraged by the refusal of many Muslim citizens to integrate and accept France's traditional values.

Five years ago, under President Sarkozy, the government banned the wearing of the niqab (full-face veil) in public. Since then, 908 women have been cautioned by police, but none has been prosecuted, and some Muslim women have apparently taken to wearing the veil out of defiance rather than religious conviction. For the new reactionaries, the public display of the niqab is a red rag to a bull, further evidence of France's cultural death and the decline in authority of its political leadership. Finkielkraut argues that since the politicians are no longer fit to govern, their role in defining and conducting debate must once again be assumed by intellectuals.

Another member of the band is the leftist Michel Onfray, a freelance philosopher. He is the son of Normandy peasant farmers who describes himself as an atheist and an anarchist and he would seem to have little

in common with members of the Académie Française. But Onfray has recently entered the lists in defence of Finkielkraut in the name of 'freedom of expression' which he considers almost nonexistent in France. As a result of this intervention — which won him national media coverage — Onfray was savagely attacked by former comrades for 'supporting the ideas of the National Front'. One even suggested he should be sent to a mental asylum — rather proving Onfray's point.

Further fuel was added to the reactionaries' fire by the distinguished maverick novelist Michel Houellebecq, whose latest title *Soumission* ('Submission') depicts a future France ruled by a Muslim president. Houellebecq belongs to no camp and has long regarded all French politicians as 'cretins', but his novel came out last January on the morning of the attack at the office of *Charlie Hebdo*. The sales campaign had to be abandoned, and Houellebecq, labelled 'Islamophobic', went into hiding under police protection. *Soumission* was nonetheless a bestseller.

For the new movement, political issues defined by the term '*souverainisme*' — national sovereignty, migration, border controls, security, the constitution and cultural identity — are no longer extreme-right territory, they are also of legitimate concern to the left. For the traditional left, the oppo-



'I'm drinking to forget I'm not supposed to eat sausages.'

nents of the new reactionaries, the very term 'national sovereignty' is an insult. They look on '*souverainisme*' in Europe as the mirror image of jihadism in the Muslim world. They denounce 'populism' and 'xenophobia' and any argument that might seem to support the Front National. But the violence of their counter-attack has led to accusations of 'neo-Stalinism' and 'smear tactics'. A defence of the reactionaries is being led by the veteran political journalist Jean-François Kahn, founder of the down-market weekly news review *Marianne*. Kahn pointed out the illogicality in arguing that because the Front National highlights problems caused by mass immigration, anyone who accepts the existence of these problems is a supporter of the Front National. If the left continues to abandon causes adopted by the FN, he adds, all it will do is to give the extreme right an ever larger space in which to operate.

Writing in the left-wing daily *Libération*, Kahn went further and suggested that the left's disastrous tactics were the main reason for the FN's progress — a rise in support from 10 per cent in 2007 to 27 per cent today. Kahn is 77, and his reward for this insolence was 'death by trolls'; a fake obituary posted on the internet just after his article appeared.

Meanwhile the ultimate cause of all this turmoil, Marine Le Pen, president of the Front National, is enjoying the spectacle. She continues to polish her party's image, gradually transforming it from a despised extremist group into 'a party like any other'. She is openly courting the Jewish vote, proclaiming her support for Israel and emphasising that she no longer has anything in common with her anti-Semitic father, Jean-Marie, founder of the party. While the rancid old monster calls Auschwitz 'a detail' of the second world war, Marine describes it as the 'worst crime committed in the history of mankind'.

In next December's regional elections Marine Le Pen expects the National Front to win control of the region of Picardy, which includes Calais, and of Provence, which includes Marseilles. In the run-up, the National Front's favourite issues — crime, unemployment and immigration — are dominating the debate, and the more Le Pen's opponents struggle to marginalise her, the more legitimate her party becomes.



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BREWIN DOLPHIN

The years of pain

I'm an old hand at cancer. I've had it nearly half my life

MARIO READING

I remember the exact day my illness first declared itself. Twenty-seven years ago. Thursday 20 October 1988. My then wife and I were at a viewing of Harry Hook's *The Kitchen Toto* at the Strode Theatre in Street when I felt a sudden, crippling pain in my back. Being 35 and a grown-up, I tried to ignore it. But the pain came back when we went for a pizza that evening, and I ended up crawling to the gents', mewling and cawing.

It took me 11 days to summon up the courage to go to my GP. 'I'm having terrible pain on the left of my spine. I passed something like a piece of liver in my urine. And I've got a lump on one testicle.' The GP looked me up and down, as if to say, what is a young man like you doing in a place like this? 'You've had a kidney stone but you've passed it,' he said, at length. 'And there's nothing whatsoever wrong with your testicle. Now off you go and let me treat patients who are really ill.'

A few days later I left for France, to look for a house in which to save my marriage. By the summer of 1989, I had the house in France, my marriage was over, and my left kidney had collapsed and was threatening to poison me. 'We need to take the kidney out fast,' my French doctor said. 'I'm sending you to Purpan Hospital in Toulouse.'

Over the next four years I was to visit every hospital in Toulouse many times. Purpan. Rangueil. Claudius Regaud. The surgeon at Purpan took out my kidney in an eight-hour operation. 'Cutting through the muscles of your stomach was like slicing through thick dough,' he said. I felt flattened. It's odd how vanity and ego can so easily defeat common sense. When I left the hospital, the weather outside peaked at 44°C. Aged 36, I began to understand what it would be like to be old, as I could only walk at a pathetic shuffle, and it took me ten interminable minutes in the sweltering sunshine to reach the bus.

Thus began three terrible, pain-filled years. My doctor, who had become a friend by now, told me that the excruciating agony in my back and leg was due to adhesions from my kidney operation. I believed her. Just as I'd believed the Glastonbury GP. I became a master of pain medicines. I learnt yoga. I spent unconscionable hours beneath boiling hot showers. And still the pain didn't go away.

I finally went to an arthritis expert in

Gourdon. Sucking on a cigarette, he told me to stretch forwards over his doctor's couch and stick my bum in the air. He touched me on the back. I screamed. 'Well,' he said. 'You are either imagining this, or you have a tumour.' He sent me for an X-ray. It showed nothing. 'Please,' I said. 'Please. Just look harder.' The doctor looked. 'Well, there might be a small shadow here.' He prodded the photo. I was sent for a scan. When I went in to see the consultant he shook his head sadly. 'You have ganglions,' he said. 'Many ganglions.'

'What are ganglions?' I said. He seemed taken aback. 'Tumours,' he said. 'You have tumours. All over your lymph system. You have one wrapped around your aorta and

Seven years in, my consultant made me a small bow and apologised for not being able to cure me

touching your sciatic nerve. That is why you have been having so much pain these last three years.' I nearly wept with relief. At last! I might be dying, but I finally knew what I was dying of. When my French doctor realised that she had been misdiagnosing me for three years, she burst into ungovernable tears. I knew exactly how she felt. They put me on massive doses of morphine and for the first time in years I was out of pain. Hallucinating — the wallpaper creeping like an insect; the nurses' faces swollen grotesquely — but out of pain.

'We don't know yet what caused your secondary cancer, but we shall conduct biopsies to find out. But first, because you are in a new relationship, we suggest taking some of your sperm in case you ever want to have another child.' The sperm was azoospermic. Dead as a dodo. Had been for years. 'We are going to

assume, even though there is no evidence of it, that the cancer began in your testicle and then moved to your lymph system,' they said. 'So we are going to give you chemotherapy and radiotherapy and see what happens.'

'But I went to a doctor in 1988,' I wailed. 'With a lump on my left testicle.'

'And what did he say?'

'Bugger off,' I said. 'He told me to bugger off.'

'A shame,' said my French consultant. 'If caught early enough, a seminoma is among the easiest cancers to treat. Yours, unfortunately, is five years old.'

So I spent a long and miserable summer being looked after by my lovely Mexican girlfriend (who is now my wife) while the French medical system slowly saved my life. 'I trained at the Royal Marsden,' my radiotherapist told me, the morning of my release from hospital. 'I am going to do you a favour and refer you on to them for follow-up when you return to England. Apart from us, they are the best cancer hospital in Europe. You are now, to all intents and purposes, cured.'

Without knowing it, by that simple kindly act, he saved my life again. I returned to England and was duly followed up by the Marsden. Eight years into my follow-up, they found I had prostate cancer. 'But I'm only 47,' I told them. 'Old men get prostate cancer. Not men my age.'

'You have young man's prostate cancer. It's more aggressive. We'll have to cut it out.'

They tried their hardest, I give them that. Designed new radiotherapy around where the French had given me theirs. But seven years in, my consultant made a small bow and apologised for not being able to cure me. 'We must now move from the curative to the palliative.' Well. I had been there before. I'd had one miracle. Maybe I would have another?

In the intervening years I have tried every advanced treatment and every trial going. A fresh bout of chemotherapy has failed. As have enzalutamide and abiraterone, wonder drugs for some people, but for me exquisite torture. For the past two years I am back on the morphine and living with pain, as with an old friend one would prefer to distance oneself from, except one allows habit to overcome good sense. Recently, the Cancer Drug Fund has subbed me for a course of radium that, for two exquisite months, granted me what amounted to a genuine remission.

Now the pain is back. But I am an old hand at cancer. Have had it nearly half my life. I live on despite it. And when I was dying, all those years ago back in France, I had a direct experience of God that made everything OK for me from then onwards. I am easy with it now. Only occasionally get frightened. Most of the time the cancer and I have a pragmatic stand-off. It knows it will kill me. I know it will kill me. But it's all a matter of time.

And meanwhile I can still write and I can still read and I can still bring up my three-year-old granddaughter.



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Converting the Corbyn cult

Before they can talk to the wider electorate, Labour MPs must win a life-or-death argument with their core supporters

NICK COHEN

If Labour is ever to clamber out of its cage on the fringe of politics, it will have to convince the 250,000 supporters who voted for Jeremy Corbyn to turn from far-leftists into social democrats. The necessity of persuading them that they made a terrible mistake is so obvious to Labour MPs that they barely need to talk about it.

In case it is not obvious to you, let me spell it out. Corbyn exacerbates every fault that kept Labour from power in 2015, and then adds some new ones, just for fun. To the failure to convince the voters that Labour can be trusted with control of the borders and the management of public money and the economy, Corbyn and his comrades bring their support for the nationalist and imperialist Putin regime, the theocratic Iranian regime, and the women-, Jew- and gay- haters of radical Islam. Corbyn's Labour will ask a Britain it seems to despise to give it power. Britain will never do so, and every Labour politician I have spoken to accepts that the Labour party will have to destroy Corbyn before Corbyn destroys the Labour party.

A palace coup is not impossible. The party conference has to endorse Labour's leader annually. In normal times, the endorsement is a formality. These are not normal times, however, and if the parliamentary party puts forward just one candidate, and refuses to nominate Corbyn or a supporter of Corbyn, the members would have to accept the replacement.

Tony Blair's former adviser John McTernan has been arguing for weeks that MPs should put the interests of Labour voters before Labour members and dump Corbyn in 2016. The left would go wild; Labour members would scream that MPs were backstabbing bastards who had overridden party democracy. But so what? Politicians are meant to be backstabbing bastards. There are moments of crisis when their party and their country's interests demand backstabbing bastards. If today's Labour MPs can't bring themselves to be backstabbing bastards, they should step aside and make way for proper politicians who can.

Although the McTernan plan is feasible, it raises formidable difficulties. Corbyn and his supporters would call in the lawyers. They would argue that, as leader, Corbyn's name

should be on the ballot paper however few MPs nominated him. No Labour MP I have spoken to wants to take on that fight — not for now, at any rate. Instead, they want to persuade Corbyn's supporters that he has to go.

The long-term nature of that argument accounts for much of the paranoia in the Labour party. The far left knows that nine out of ten of Corbyn's colleagues want him out. MPs know that the far left wants to deselect and replace them. In the middle of these

*On the left, if you don't accept
Jeremy Corbyn's inherent goodness,
you declare your own wickedness*

manoeuvres sits the puzzled figure of Corbyn himself. Shadow cabinet members tell me that he isn't a bullying leader. On the contrary, he treats their objections to his policies politely, and lets them follow their consciences. Such is the tension in the Labour party that MPs regard Corbyn's virtues as a vice and his tolerance as weakness. They say he lacks the authority to stop Momentum,

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Bowling grenades

From 'W.G.', The Spectator, 30 October 1915: The late Dr. W.G. Grace had become in his lifetime a legend, and he is likely to remain a legend as long as Englishmen play games. Never was such a cricketer; and it is almost safe to say that there will never be such a cricketer again, for the perfection of pitches and the high organisation of the game have left less scope than there used to be for a man to achieve so great a mastery over his fellows. In this respect cricket is like war; in first-class cricket, as in war among first-class Powers, there is the same human material for personal ascendancy, but there is less opportunity for ascendancy to be practised... It is not stretching the fancy too far to trace the effects of 'W. G.'s' example in the battlefields of Flanders. A generation reared on his exploits and trained to bowl and 'throw in' hard and accurately are the best bombers the world can produce, and beat the Germans easily in length and precision.

Socialist Organiser, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the rest of the far left coming for sitting MPs, even if he wants to.

Corbyn supporters' screams of 'Tory!' at all who disagree with them — their gobbiness and on occasion their gobbing too — suggest it is delusional for Labour MPs to hope that one day they will agree to abandon their hero. On the left at the moment, if you don't accept Corbyn's intrinsic goodness and dismiss reports of his alliances with the Russian nationalist right and Islamist religious right as 'smears', then you are making a public declaration of your own wickedness.

'I'm a very low-rung academic in the humanities, and I have learnt the art of holding my tongue 24 hours a day,' writes a correspondent reporting in from the core Corbyn heartland of higher education. 'It's like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* here. If I could get out of academia, I would. It's almost as if they prefer having Tories to shout at than a Labour government to be disappointed in.'

Cultists who damn doubters as not just wrong but wicked are not easily persuaded to change, particularly when beneath the hypocrisy, the utopianism, the posturing and the sickly indulgence of secular and religious tyranny, they have a decent argument. The 2008 banking crash led to the punishment of working- and middle-class people who were not responsible for it. We now have a Conservative government intent on pushing the 'striving' poor it purports to support into penury. Surely it is not 'far left' to see the immorality in that, and not utopian to believe that a populist political movement can be built to fight it?

Herein lies the Labour membership's problem, and Labour MPs' slim hope. The careers of Corbyn and his advisers have been dominated by opposition to Anglo-American wars, and support for the IRA, Chavista Venezuela, Iran, radical Islam and every Russian dictator from Brezhnev to Putin. They have not been interested in domestic politics, and have no idea how to change it.

Corbyn's shadow chancellor supported George Osborne's fiscal responsibility charter, only to U-turn when the poor fool finally realised it would stop him opposing austerity. The strongest stand against the government's cut to tax credits has not come from Corbyn's supposedly left-wing Labour, but from the supposedly compromised Liberal Democrats.

Several shadow ministers told me that Corbyn's support would shrink as members realised that he was hopeless at opposing the government. In the long run, his own incompetence would do for him, they said.

Whether Labour has the luxury of waiting years for its members to realise that Corbyn is not the fighter they thought him to be was not a question they either posed or answered. In the long run we are all dead, said Lord Keynes. For Labour, it may be sooner than that.



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Without a word, Paul Methuen set me free



At the time he will barely have noticed me. In his mid-forties and (to me at 18) middle-aged, he was our host at a dinner in his beautiful old house in Kingston, Jamaica: a wooden mansion that in its time had seen the town spread up from the harbour and push back the sugar plantations. But as you'd expect from a man for whom garden design was a passion, Paul's house had kept its generous grounds from the age of sugar.

Everything about Paul Methuen was generous: from his hospitality, to the sheer variety of his guests, to his warm and wicked sense of mischief and the measures of the whisky he dispensed (and consumed). In truth there were no measures: the idea of measuring a drink — indeed of measuring anything except the interiors and gardens he loved — would have been alien to Paul's nature.

The great mahogany table was magnificently laid, the candle flames hovered motionless in the still, tropical night, and the crystal and silver shone. To me it seemed another world. This was a big dinner party, centred around the Shakespeare — and the Shakespeare playhouse — he had sponsored in Kingston. Paul had invited my mother, a keen supporter of his theatre. I trotted along behind: an eldest son shortly to take up a place at Cambridge, returning to an England I had left aged four. As it turned out, I was to make my life and career there. None of this could I foresee.

Paul did not know me, nor I him. To me he seemed exotic: a towering and extravagant figure — old-fashioned yet faintly outré, and just tremendous fun.

One heard gossip, of course, but there were things in Paul's deeply traditionalist world that one simply didn't name, so now he is dead I shall respect those proprieties. His friend on the island (and, as a designer, his client) Noël Coward, when pressed in old age on the inevitable question, used to demur by replying that the question came too late to matter and anyway the answer would upset too many old ladies. In Paul's case, I doubt the old ladies would have been greatly surprised. Tall, dark and strikingly handsome, he was not the marrying kind.

It was a luminous evening. Evenings at Paul's always were, people said, though I

had no chance for real conversation with my host. I simply observed him. I later supposed that if I had ever even really impinged on his consciousness, he had long forgotten me.

But I never forgot him. You know how it is that someone, something, some almost random, fleeting, utterly unimportant scene, makes an impression and the impression sticks when what went before and after has long faded — and you don't really know why? That evening lodged deep. In my imagination the picture of Paul did too. He must have been the cause of a kind of awakening that resonated through my life thereafter.

In that moment I had seen that it was possible to grow old, never marry, be solitary, be sociable, and have a wonderful life.

You know how it is that someone makes an impression which sticks long after all the other details have faded?

I also saw that money could make a big difference. The thought occurred to me for the first time that it would be a fine thing to become a rich old man. Perhaps I had been worrying about such things, and that is why his example struck so deep. Some 30 years later I did find a companion in life, but companionship — and the years before companionship — have been illuminated for me by



'Do you remember how happy we were in the early days, before we met...?'

the lesson that one is not 'rescued' by finding a mate. Life is grand, either way.

Of course Paul never said a word on this. Utterly undidactic, he wasn't teaching a lesson, but living it. He had a kind of deep internal honesty that was in no wise at odds with his great discretion.

He was being himself; and I saw that you could, and not care too much what people thought, and have a grand old time, and lots of friends, and the sky would not fall in. Funny to say this of so old-school a figure as Paul but, 'liberal' as my own upbringing had been, meeting this (in some ways) throw-back to another age was liberating to me.

Paul Methuen's memorial service last Saturday, at St Peter's in Seaview on his beloved Isle of Wight, filled the little church. Organised by the Sea View Yacht Club (Paul was an avid and outstanding yachtsman) the occasion was warm and funny. There were few tears, because his life had been such a hoot. The congregation was well-stocked with upper-crusty yachting types of a certain age, and I was almost the only man there with no handkerchief in his top pocket: genial company, including some of the old ladies who most certainly wouldn't have been shocked. The hall was filled with people who loved Paul and who regaled us all with tales of derring-do, while the actor Keith Baxter gave a marvellous account of Jamaica days with Coward and Ian Fleming. Keeping my other thoughts to myself, I simply recited Shakespeare's 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun...' from *Cymbeline*, as Paul had made me promise to do a decade ago, when he was in his eighties.

Neither of us had realised the occasion would wait until he was 91. Much later in both our lives we had made contact, and seen a good deal of each other in his old age. Paul had been undiminished almost to the end. He was (people told me) proud of what his young guest in Kingston had made of himself in the ensuing half century.

I hope he knew how much I admired him. Paul taught a lesson beyond the one I've mentioned. It is that when we least imagine it, others, sometimes younger, sometimes hardly noticed by us, may be observing us. When we least think it, we may be teaching — even inspiring, Paul did.

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Are we all potential cyberterrorists now?



Hollywood got there first, of course. Back in 1983, before most of us even learned — then forgot again — what a modem was, Matthew Broderick starred in the seminal and brilliant *WarGames*. He played a computer hacker; a teenager who goes hunting for games on the global computer network that isn't quite called the internet, yet. Unwittingly, he instead hacks into Norad, the North American Aerospace Defense Command and, via a convoluted series of events we need not go into here, very nearly sparks World War Three.

Various angry generals assume, first of all, that he is the Russians. Then they assume he must at least be working for the Russians. But he isn't. He's just some kid who isn't even Ferris Bueller yet. At his fingertips, nonetheless, is the expertise to blow up the world. I thought of him this week, when a boy of 15 was arrested in County Antrim on suspicion of hacking into the broadband provider which sponsors *The X Factor*.

It might not have been him. He was freed on bail the next day. The point, though, is that it could have been. No, the hacking of TalkTalk was not quite World War Three, although Lord knows you could have been forgiven for thinking it was, given the fuss made on Radio 4's *Today* programme. Was somebody senior a customer, perhaps? Either way, the initial suspicion was that it could have been cyberterrorists of some sort; perhaps Islamists. Somebody ominous. And maybe it was. Or maybe it wasn't. Maybe it was nobody much at all.

Western security services are on a cyber-PR push right now. Possibly it's the groundwork for Britain's pending Investigatory Powers Bill, which seems to be popping up at the same time as America's Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act. Always, the stated targets are big and scary. Having finally wearied of TalkTalk, the BBC had Richard Ledgett, the deputy director of America's National Security Agency, who spoke in a gravelly voice about the threat of cyber-attacks by hostile nation-states. As our own bill draws closer, expect to hear others warn-

ing of cyberterrorism, organised crime, paedophile rings.

These are all things worth worrying about, more so now than ever. One quiet upshot of the defection of the former CIA analyst Edward Snowden in 2013 (you remember; there was nothing else in the *Guardian* for months) was that many US-based internet companies — Facebook, Gmail, etc. — switched on encryption by default. As a result, at least so far as we know, western security services suddenly found it much harder to monitor email traffic, to whatever extent they were already

In the case of terrorists, criminals and paedos, this snooping seems all to the good. But what about everyone else?

legally allowed to do so. We are on the cusp, in other words, of near-unbreakable encryption becoming ubiquitous. Everybody will use it. Indeed, you'll probably need a high level of technical nous to turn it off.

According to the technology press, the government's pending bill is best understood as a workaround for this. However strongly you encrypt your communications, you always need at some point to decrypt them again in order to read them. This bill places a focus not on intercepting traffic, but on the devices that are ultimately used to read it. Which, in the case of terrorists, criminals and paedos, seems all for the good.

What about everybody else, though? What about, for example, 15-year-old boys

from County Antrim? How do you monitor them? And if you don't, how do you catch them if it turns out — and of course, it might not — that they have hacked TalkTalk? Or to put that another way, how do you catch the bad guys, when the bad guys could be anybody at all?

The *New Yorker* once ran a brilliant cartoon of a floppy-eared hound sitting at a keyboard. 'On the internet,' ran the caption, 'nobody knows you are a dog.' Nobody knows, either, whether you're an Islamist cyberterrorist or a kid doing the digital age equivalent of hurling a brick through a window. We are about to dive into a big old debate about the dangers that lurk online, from which our government wishes to protect us. Sooner or later, though, somebody has to be honest about where they can come from, which is anywhere at all. One day, almost anybody will be able to start World War Three. So do we want the spooks to be watching almost everybody? Or what?

Swede victory

Triumph! For years now, I have been conducting an annual campaign to restore the Halloween turnip. A campaign hindered, I'll grant you, by the South calling a turnip a swede and the North and Scots doing vice versa, which rather complicates matters, and must cause a fair degree of shouting at grocers in the Midlands. And frankly, apart from a handful of people on Twitter (we carve, we bleed, we share photos, it's all rather forlorn) nobody has given a damn.

Not this year, though. This year, thanks to an apparent shortage of those damned squash-family-answer-to-the-grey-squirrel pumpkins, Halloween turnip advocacy has been visible on the pages of the *Daily Mail*, the *Telegraph*, the *Independent* and the *Guardian*, and in the news on both Sky and ITV. This is our moment. This is our tipping point. Although I've a nagging fear they might mean swedes. But still.

Martin Vander Weyer on TalkTalk, p. 30.



'So was Mr Blair's apology both full and frank?'

We should all be feminists

Sir: Articles proclaiming the death of feminism are appearing like clockwork in the press at the moment ('Bad winners', 24 October). Each time, it prompts feminists to respond passionately, demonstrating that far from being over, feminism is experiencing a resurgence. Witness the crowds that gathered at the Feminism in London conference at the weekend, or the stats which refuse to budge: the 19 per cent gender pay gap, the 54,000 pregnant women who are discriminated against at work each year, and the two women per week who die at the hands of a partner or former partner.

But there is a more serious underlying issue. We still hear all too often from those who state, as Meryl Streep did recently, 'I'm not a feminist but...', before going on to identify with the very cause from which they have just distanced themselves. So while feminism is resurgent, it is also exclusive. If you want a world where everyone can fulfil their potential and make choices that have nothing to do with their gender, then you are a feminist. Who doesn't want that? It is time to reveal the hidden feminist in us all.

Sam Smethers

*Chief executive of the Fawcett Society
London SE1*

Glass ceiling, glass floor

Sir: I agree with Emily Hill that feminism, which started as a genuine crusade against prejudice, has become a form of pointless attention-seeking. The problem is that revolutionaries never know when to stop. Once the glass ceiling has been broken, they then invent the glass floor. The truth is, as Cosmo Landesman implies ('Here come the humanists', 24 October) that most of us have evolved beyond feminism, and now believe in equality for all.

*Stan Labovitch
Windsor*

No need for ivory

Sir: The media recently featured a picture of a hunter toasting his success beside the carcass of a magnificent elephant. Charles Moore (Notes, 24 October) advocates legalising this by breeding elephants for hunting and the ivory trade, arguing that cows only exist because they are useful. But there is no 'need' for ivory — it is dentine traded by criminals to provide high-value goods for people with warped values.

Attitudes to the hunting of endangered species have changed dramatically in many countries through education, backed

up by some spectacular wildlife filming. The Chinese go to great expense to protect and increase the population of their giant pandas, whose value is mainly symbolic. Surely, in this 'golden era' of relations with China, we can make a powerful case for giving equal consideration to the elephant, an intelligent creature with many endearing qualities. Do they really want to go down in history as the nation that saved the panda but killed off the elephant?

Sandra Jones

Old Cleeve, Somerset

An expert in diplomacy

Sir: In his letter of 24 October, the 94-year-old Sir Archie Lamb modestly does not mention that he ably describes the evolution of the Diplomatic Service from pure diplomacy to the promotion of 'trade' in his latest memoir, *The World Moves On*. This is history from the inside as he rises from pre-war filing clerk (with a break as a Hurricane and Typhoon pilot) to ambassador and the Diplomatic Service Inspectorate.

Dr Ian Olson

Aberdeen

Not a red brick among them

Sir: Harry Mount gives unwarranted status to the academic institutions attended by Jeremy Corbyn's shadow cabinet by implying they were red-brick universities ('Red-brick revolutionaries', 24 October). Red-brick universities do not feature among the higher education centres mentioned in his article.

The term 'red-brick university' was given in 1943 to six universities with high academic status, particularly in science, technology and medicine. These universities were strongly allied to their host cities and accordingly designated civic universities. In recent time the original six — Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Birmingham and Bristol — have been joined by other universities to form the Russell Group. All these universities are research-intensive and are held in high regard, particularly by those of us who were fortunate enough to attend and work in them.

*Prof. Sir Miles Irving (Liverpool, 1953-1959)
Woodstock, Oxfordshire*

Canada rocks

Sir: For reasons unknown, Canada receives scant attention in the pages of your great publication; even New Zealand gets more mention. So it was with delight that I read Rod Liddle's catalogue of 'right-wingish' rock bands including Rush, BTO, and sometimes (not now) Neil Young — all Canadian (26 September). This is consistent with the rebellious nature of the rock genre. For most of our history, Canada has been ruled by the 'left-wingish' Liberal party.

*Kevin Sheedy
Toronto, Ontario*

Planning disasters

Sir: Mark Palmer talks about the need for bungalows for the ageing population ('Britain needs bungalows', 17 October) and the lack of newly built homes suitable for the elderly. What he fails to note is the number of bungalows that are bought at low prices by the young, who are then given planning permission to knock them down and rebuild two-storey family homes. A line of half a dozen bungalows built in my village in the 1950s and 1960s have now been lost in this way.

I have sold my old farmhouse and am doing up a small barn to live in in my old age. There was no help from the council, who took 15 years to agree. Planning should be taken away from the obstructive planning departments in all councils.

*John Hancox
South Cerney, Gloucestershire*

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PORSCHE

TalkTalk tells us the internet is only three clicks from anarchy



I'm not a customer of TalkTalk, the phone company which revealed last week that a hacker had potentially compromised the personal data of four million users. But I feel I'm on the front line of the cyberwar nevertheless. In August, someone unknown to me tried to spend £1,200 at House of Fraser on my credit card account. The bank, to its credit, sniffed a fraud, rejected the transaction, cancelled the card and invited me to speak to a nice young man in India who talked me through the corrective procedure, including deleting a false email address inserted by the fraudster and setting up a new password to add extra security for future contacts.

A replacement card was dispatched but lost in the post, presumed stolen; after three weeks a second one reached me and service was restored — except that I stopped receiving monthly statements. When I eventually queried this, a nice young lady in India (who did not ask for my new password, I noticed) said, 'But we've been sending them by email...' and recited the fraudulent email address, which had somehow undeleted itself. So the bad guy, if still at large, not only has my new account details but knows more about my actual spending over the past three months than I do myself, since I have no record of it.

Meanwhile, someone else unknown to me (am I paranoid in thinking it might be the same person?) seized my Facebook account, befriended a bunch of strangers on my behalf, and started sending out adverts for a well-known brand of sunglasses in my name. Meanwhile also, a 15-year-old youth in County Antrim is reported to have been arrested in connection with the TalkTalk incident — which provoked a £360 million fall in the company's market value, despite its chief executive's claim that the severity of the attack was 'materially lower' than first feared. I'm left thinking maybe there's a 15-year-old in Dyfed or Clywd or Novosibirsk who's pretending to be me and has sufficient confidential data stashed away to continue doing so whenever I think it's safe to go back in the water.

Internet businesses with many millions of customers cannot possibly stay ahead of the hackers, whether they be back-bedroom geeks or 'boiler room' gangs, or monitor every suspicious event in detail. E-commerce is a miracle of economic efficiency, so I was thinking on Monday as I drove through the now tollbooth-free and relatively jam-free Dartford Tunnel, having paid my 'Dart Charge' by credit card online. But we are in thrall to a phenomenon we cannot control or escape, and it's only ever going to be three clicks from anarchy.

Python watch

I promised a couple of weeks ago to keep an eye on the 'writhing python of doom' that threatens to throttle the economic upswing. The first story that catches my eye is a profit warning from AP Møller-Maersk, the family-controlled Danish company whose container ships — displaying a seven-point white star on a blue background as their emblem — transport some 15 per cent of the world's manufactured goods and provide a near-perfect indicator of the trajectory of global trade.

Maersk says container business declined in the third quarter and early October, with particular weakness on routes between Asia and Europe. It has notched down its expectation of growth in container demand from 3–5 per cent to 2–4 per cent. Not exactly a signal that the oceans are about to freeze over, but a drop in the barometer that accords with slower UK third-quarter growth and the CBI's statement that UK manufacturers have been 'struggling with weak export demand for several months'.

Maersk's Copenhagen-listed shares, incidentally, have plunged by 40 per cent since the end of March as pessimistic investors anticipated the trend now confirmed by container trade figures — offering another near-perfect indicator, alongside the recent crash of the Shanghai bourse, of the propensity of stock markets to overdramatise underlying economic downturns.

Shoppers' express

I also feel it my duty, as ever, to highlight good-news stories. So let me salute the opening of the £320 million rail link from London Marylebone to Oxford Parkway, a new station alongside the A34 at Kidlington, just north of the Oxford bypass; the project will be completed by connecting to Oxford's city station next year. This is smart transport development at relatively modest cost, making Oxford's northern hinterland a one-hour commute for many who are now unlikely ever to be able to afford to live closer to central London.

Even smarter, the line includes a reopened station at Bicester Village, the 130-brand retail destination which attracts more than 6 million shoppers a year, two thirds of them tourists from China, the Middle East and elsewhere. This tide of visitors spends at a rate per square foot of retail space that's five times the average for UK shopping centres, making a colossal contribution to UK foreign exchange earnings. The new train service will make it even easier for them to exercise their credit cards, which I hope will remain unhacked while they're here; I also hope they leave enough seats for the long-suffering commuters.

The new line is a collaboration between Chiltern Railways and quasi-state-owned Network Rail. Chiltern (which scored 92 per cent for customer satisfaction last year) was originally M40 Trains, a management buyout by former British Rail managers with private-equity backing; now it's part of Arriva, which also operates — pretty efficiently, in my experience — Cross Country, Grand Central and several other UK services. Arriva is owned by Deutsche Bahn (Europe's largest rail operator, carrying two billion passengers a year) which in turn is wholly owned by the German taxpayer.

Those facts might seem to support the Corbyn argument that the best place for our railways is under state ownership, to which the answer is: only if it's a state like Germany that still knows how to run decent trains.



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BOOKS & ARTS



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*Eames House living room,
Stephen Bayley — p48*

A.N. Wilson finds Iris Murdoch's letters disappointingly dull and silly
Josephine Livingstone recommends the best ghost stories for Hallowe'en
Michela Wrong relishes

Haile Selassie's ministers bowing to the telephone when put through to the King of Kings
Claudia Massie is depressed that all-women exhibitions still need to exist

Mark Palmer wonders what he's doing at yet another Bob Dylan gig when he vowed never to return
James Delingpole is pleased to discover that not all crap TV is all that crap

BOOKS

Through the Looking Glass

John le Carré has been writing about a mirror world for over 50 years — and he'll continue to do so for as long as his father haunts him, says *Andrew Lycett*

John le Carré: The Biography

by Adam Sisman

Bloomsbury, £25, pp. 652,

ISBN 9781408827925

Spectator Bookshop, £22

'Have you got over your father yet?' the 26-year-old David Cornwell was asked by MI5's head of personnel when he joined the agency in the spring of 1958. And the answer, more than half a century later, has to be 'no'. We knew of his conman father Ronnie's cartoonish presence in Cornwell's life, but never the extent to which he has dominated his very being.

After leaving Lincoln College, Oxford, Cornwell taught for a couple of years at Eton, where he disliked the '*Herrenvolk* doctrine' expounded in what he called the 'spiritual home of the English upper classes'. So he sought a return to the secret world that he had glimpsed as a gap-year student in Bern, after leaving Sherborne and before going up to Oxford.

While in Switzerland he was approached by a British diplomat and asked to keep an eye on fellow students — a practice he maintained at Oxford, where he developed a more formal liaison with MI5. Although a member of the exclusive Gridiron Club, he was happy to adopt a left-wing persona, join the university Communist club, and monitor potential subversives.

The strain of this double life proved intolerable. During his second year at Oxford he experienced what Ann Sharp, soon to be his wife, later called a 'mini-breakdown', and, while he may have struggled with the compromises he made in putting love of country before that of friends, the underlying cause was his unresolved relationship with his father, who had just gone spectacularly bankrupt (with liabilities of £1.35 million, or more than £33 million today) and whose roguish antics enliven this book, sometimes threatening to upstage its subject.

Since Ronnie's death in 1975, Cornwell (I follow Sisman's nomenclature) has dithered, uncharacteristically, over his memory. He has put his father into several novels (the most

autobiographical being *A Perfect Spy*), toyed with a play about him, spent £10,000 on private detectives to probe his background, and has several times started, and scrapped, a proposed memoir, which he now says will be published next year. This has been interpreted as a sign of his disapproval of Sisman. But, although the association between biographer and subject was often tense, it survived; and this book is testament to Sisman's skill and perseverance.

The Ronnie stories are manifold — the bankruptcies, the extravagant living, the telephone calls that Cornwell fielded from all over the world, relating how his father's latest scam had landed him in jail. Ronnie seduced women in his son's name. And he had the temerity to sue him for libel over his portrayal as Aldo Cassidy's father in *The Naive and Sentimental Lover*. Tellingly,

Cornwell fielded telephone calls from all over the world relating how his father's latest scam had landed him in jail

while at prep school during the war, Cornwell invented a secret service career for his father to explain why he hadn't been called up. No wonder he claimed to have rejoiced at his demise.

Despite his zeal, Sisman occasionally admits that a detail may be 'apochryphal', while Cornwell himself agitates over 'false memories'. Was he really touched up by his father? And did he rebuff a pass from W.H. Auden (who told him, 'Well, it's nice to be fancied, isn't it?') — a story echoed in *Smiley's People*?

One begins to understand the atmosphere of uncertainty and deception which plagued Cornwell's early years and provided the material for his life's work. He himself noted the relief he felt at 'coming inside' when, after university and teaching at Eton, he returned to the 'priesthood' of the security services.

Then there's the pseudonym. John le Carré wasn't Cornwell's first choice. Living uncomfortably in Bonn after transferring from MI5 to MI6, he wrote his first novel, *Call for the Dead*, which he submitted under the name of 'Jean Sanglas', first to Collins, who rejected it, and then, at the suggestion of fellow thriller-writer and MI5 colleague John Bingham, to Gollancz. The publisher recommended a more macho moniker, such as 'Chuck Smith'. Can this be true, or is it again questionable? Anyway John le Carré emerged, adding another layer to the veil between the reality and the man.

Call for the Dead went well, allowing Cornwell to joke about having to write 'brilliant, untidy letters for future biographers'. Before long he was drawing on his MI6 experiences in Germany for *The Looking Glass War* and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, which critics praised for their realistic take on modern espionage — in contrast to James Bond. The latter novel was particularly successful after it was filmed with Richard Burton in the lead role of Alec Leamas, and Cornwell became a rich man.

He moved on to his acknowledged masterpiece, generally known as the Smiley quartet, beginning with *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, which explored the enduring themes of duplicity and moral culpability through stories about double agents. The secret, remarked Smiley, was not to offer the Crown Jewels and get chicken-feed in return. Cornwell created an extraordinary world, centred on the Circus and its battle against Karla, as well as contributing a new, if fanciful, vocabulary of moles and lamplighters to the English language.

With his excellent grasp of the wider history, Sisman is good at anchoring Cornwell in this shadowy environment, as he guides his readers through the models for various

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John le Carré in 1964, shortly after the publication of *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*

characters (Smiley draws on Bingham and Vivian Green, Cornwell's tutor and mentor at Lincoln).

Cornwell's steady progress was interrupted when he met James Kennaway, a charismatic writer, whose wife Susan became his lover. This led to a torrid three-way relationship which, to the disgust of his publishers who wanted another spy thriller, he later represented in fiction in his flawed but entertaining 'hippy' novel *The Naive and Sentimental Lover*. Drawing on his admiration for German culture, the title pointed to Friedrich Schiller's distinction between direct and reflective poetry, allowing Cornwell to examine a favourite topic — the rapprochement between freedom and society.

The affair brought an end to his troubled marriage to Ann. After 'six months' madness' of sexual abandon, he met Jane Eustace, who worked in publishing and introduced him to new outlets in Britain and the United States. A gentle soul and willing helpmeet, she became his second wife.

While Ronnie's death provided one natural break in Cornwell's life, another was the protracted collapse of communism in the late 1980s. Deprived of Cold War subject matter, he began to write about other places and conflicts, from Russia itself in *The Russia House* to Africa in *The Constant Gardener*, his attack on the machinations of the global pharmaceutical industry. Slightly earlier, he published *The Little Drum-*

mer Girl, a book inspired by his half-sister Charlotte, which took him to the Middle East, where he found his natural pro-Israeli inclinations gave way to a sympathy for displaced Palestinians.

The common theme of Cornwell's later work is his fury at what he regards as the cynicism of the British establishment. Admitting to charges of *alterszorn*, the rage of age, he is particularly exercised by the unholy alliance between government and corporate power. Some critics have attacked him for becoming long-winded and polemical. But most have given him the benefit of the doubt, at times comparing his ambition to Balzac's, and suggesting his output is worthy of the Man Booker prize.

Sisman brings admirable clarity to what could have been a meander in a wilderness of mirrors. He explains the plots and business backgrounds of the various novels. He introduces friends, ranging from Alan Clark to Stephen Fry. But there are places he doesn't go, such as Cornwell's operational record in MI6, as well as some personal relationships, including his affair with an anonymous woman in Bonn.

Cornwell's latest book, *A Delicate Truth* (2013), topped the bestseller list 50 years after the publication of *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*. As he enters his 85th year, why does he continue to bother? Well, he's a writer, still exploring the delicate faultlines between freedom and society, and still possessed by demons, one of which, for all his professed loathing, is a nagging residue of admiration for his father.

How else should we read a passage which he excised from *The Honourable Schoolboy*, the book he was working on when Ronnie died? Here the journalist-turned-spy Jerry Westerby comforts himself with the thought that his own wayward father's life was not a failure, 'but a statement of personal freedom to strive, to love, even the freedom if necessary to fail....' As an author, Cornwell — let's say le Carré — remains one of our greatest defenders of such basic liberties in a complex and morally ambiguous world.

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Paradise —
with a strong
undercurrent of
violence

A hint of anarchy everywhere

Justin Marozzi

Elephant Complex: Travels in Sri Lanka

by John Gimlette

Quercus, £25, pp. 517,
ISBN 9781782067962
Spectator Bookshop, £22

For a genre that is frequently dismissed as dead, travel writing is proving a remarkably stubborn survivor. If anything, this year's Stanford Dolman Travel Book of the Year Award, won by Horatio Clare with *Down to the Sea in Ships*, a very British tale of the container-shipping trade, demonstrated how the genre remains in remarkably good health, shrugging off its perennial obituaries with great élan. Bristling with literary talent, the shortlist took in Jens Mühlhling on Russia, Elizabeth Pisani on Indonesia, a homage to Paddy Leigh Fermor by Nick Hunt, Helena Attlee on Italy and Philip Marsden on Cornwall.

With John Gimlette, a previous winner of the same award for *Wild Coast*, a high-spirited exploration of South America, the reader in search of a thoughtful adventure is in good hands. A London-based lawyer when he is not on the road, Gimlette brings a brisk barrister-like inquisition to proceedings, allied with amiable good humour and a searching interest in the history of peoples and places. This bodes well for a small country that is much less well known

than its giant neighbour to the northwest.

Beginning his journey a short bus ride from his home in southwest London, Gimlette wryly notes that the 8,000-strong British Tamil community in Tooting, all from the town of Velvettithurai, even has its own 'internal crime wave', courtesy of young toughs like 'the Tamil Posse' and 'the Jaffna Boys'. The Tamils can be a disputatious lot and made an unlikely impression in north Norfolk in 2001, running amok with multiple stabbings on Wells beach after a pilgrimage to Walsingham went wrong.

Gimlette has assembled a splendidly eclectic cast of characters to illuminate this complicated nation, a tapestry of race, religion and caste still bearing the colonial imprint of the Portuguese, Dutch and British. There are whiskery generals,

*Everyone in Colombo was
either in business, in hock,
in flagrante or in love*

whisky-soaked politicians, Test cricketers, slum-dwellers, a professor of elephants, a surgeon specialising in landmine injuries, the Vedda forest-dwellers, the last of the British tea-planters, a London-based academic who considers his countrymen 'Brown Brits', a tortured Tamil Tiger and the occasional elephant. Buddhist monks stalk the narrative alongside Tamil Tigers, urban Muslims and one or two tweedy Englishmen, ghosts of the 150-year British rule that ended in 1948.

From time to time there are shades of Norman Lewis. Both writers have a very

British delight in the absurd, offset by empathy with the people they are travelling among and writing about. 'Everyone in Colombo was either in business, in hock, in flagrante or in love,' Gimlette writes, in an echo of Lewis on wartime Naples or post-war Saigon. 'What other city spends so much time punishing its lovers, with so little success. There was a hint of anarchy everywhere.'

Politics, small and cosy on this tropical island, is a dynastic affair. Since 1948, most power has been preserved within four families: the Senanayakes, the Jayawardenes, the Bandaranaiques and the 'cunning southerners', the Rajapaksas. This is a place where the most lavishly well-heeled can boast, 'My family has spent the last 300 years trying hard to do absolutely nothing at all.' Nice inheritance if you can get it.

An emerald paradise on the outside, Sri Lanka has a darker interior with high levels of violence and a prevalence of suicide, frequently an expression of outrage or revenge. Perhaps it was the decision by the magnificently named Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike, Ceylon's fourth prime minister, to make Sinhala the official language in the 1950s, a move that turned the Tamils into virtual foreigners in their own country, that planted the seeds of internecine conflict and what would turn out to be Asia's longest civil war, from 1983 to 2009. Sri Lanka introduced the world to suicide bombers in the 1990s, long before their deluded Muslim counterparts in the Middle East started blowing themselves up.

Intrepid to the last, Gimlette wanders among mountains and jungles, drawing his journey to a close among the wreckage of

the civil war in the north of the country, following the conflict to its final bloody showdown at Vellamullivaikkal. The Tamils claim that 146,000 people are missing beneath the sands. The army maintains an implausible figure amounting to a village of the dead. Atrocities were committed on both sides, with sexual violence just one among many horrors inflicted on the population, but a final reckoning — and justice — has yet to be delivered. Gimlette's Tamils appear in no rush to claim it, preferring to move on and put the war behind them.

Rich in humour, full of insight and humanity, *Elephant Complex* is a very fine tribute to this enigmatic island nation.

A tale of cloaks and daggers

Andrew Barrow

Scarpia

by Piers Paul Read

Bloomsbury, £16.99, pp. 367,

ISBN 9781408867495

Spectator Bookshop, £14.99

You don't need to know the opera *Tosca* to understand and enjoy this book about Puccini's most notorious villain, Vitellio Scarpia, portrayed on stage as a 'sadistic agent of reaction', a cut-throat murderer who enjoys drinking his victims' blood from their skulls and, as one of my opera-loving Kensington pals puts it, 'not a nice bloke at all!'

In fact you may not even recognise him in these pages. Here Scarpia appears as an all-round human being, kind-hearted, handsome, likeable, occasionally lonely, even destitute, who also just happens to be a brilliant swordsman and man of action. Brought up in Sicily, his first act of daring is to rescue a girl who has been captured by Barbary pirates, even if it means stabbing her lover in the stomach. Later, he forgives one of his enemies by pretending to have him shot and thrown to the dogs but actually letting him secretly escape.

Set at the end of the 18th century and lit up by philosophical pronouncements like 'Not to forgive is itself a sin', this tender, savage book offers a powerful portrait of ancient Italy, its palazzos and parties, powdered wigs and episcopal rings, candlewax, incense, ice cream and loads of sex. Sex and seductions feature far more in this book than in any other work by Piers Paul Read to date.

These complex *tableaux vivants* are held together by the promise of some future connection between the up-and-coming Scarpia and the peasant's daughter Floria Tosca, whom we first meet singing and spell-binding clergy and congregation alike in a little old church near Venice. Scarpia's and Tosca's first encounter actually takes place some years later when Tosca, by then

a major opera star, escapes from la Fenice theatre and leaps into a gondola on the Grand Canal which happens to be occupied by Scarpia, now a baron and already being cuckolded by the most beautiful woman in Rome. Their second, more intimate, meeting comes at least 80 pages later on a bed of pine needles beside the moonlit sea after another mesmerising performance by Tosca at an open-air theatre in Sicily.

Meanwhile, there have been major international events. The French revolution has begun, the French king and five bishops have been slaughtered and foreign troops have marched into Rome. Napoleon, Nelson and even the English 'strumpet' Lady Hamilton have joined a vast cast of characters which already includes not only the 'not particularly devout' Pope Pius VI and any number of titled folk — many of them with indigestible Italian names — but also their assorted coachmen, major-duomos, outriders, valets, cooks, grooms and other attendants.

Not until the last few pages does the story overlap with the dramas portrayed by Puccini. These ghastly final scenes, which I read while sipping a delicious screw-topped Sicilian red wine, left me shocked and befuddled and even more convinced that the world is a far better place today than it was a couple of centuries ago.

Super man of legend

Richard Ingrams

Frost: That Was the Life that Was The Authorised Biography

by Neil Hegarty

W.H. Allen, £25, pp. 438,

ISBN 9780753556702

Spectator Bookshop, £22

On 13 March 2014 a congregation of 2,000 people, including many of the great and the good, gathered in Westminster Abbey for a memorial service for David Frost, who had died suddenly six months previously while travelling on the *Queen Mary* to America. During the service a select band, led by the Dean of Westminster, John Hall, retired to Poets' Corner, sacred to the memory of Keats, Shelley and others of the immortals, where the Prince of Wales laid flowers on a tablet in the floor bearing the illustrious name of Frost. Given that in only a few years' time Frost's name, along with many of today's celebrities, was likely to be forgotten, it might have been better to dedicate the tablet 'To the Unknown Television Personality'.

Considering that he had never been a poet, and that, unlike many far more deserving than he, he had been fast-tracked, this extraordinary if posthumous feat of Frost's marked a suitable climax to his career — one which had begun in 1939 in the humble home of a Methodist minister in Tenterden and led to success, fame and fortune on a lavish scale, to a knighthood, a beautiful country house, a titled wife, three fine sons all educated at Eton etc. Didn't he do well? as his fellow TV knight Sir Brucie might well have observed.

Now comes the icing on the cake in the form of an 'authorised biography', rapidly completed in only a few months by an Irish writer and journalist Neil Hegarty. There are signs of haste about the book, so that while it describes at the outset the premature death while jogging of Frost's eldest son Miles, he is on p. 413 still 'building his venture-capital enterprise'. No doubt the publisher was more alert than the Church of England to the speed at which TV celebrities fade from view and was anxious not to delay things by altering the text.

It is called an authorised biography but it ought to be called an authorised hagiography. At the outset Hegarty tells us that Frost was 'a man of great kindness, of sweetness of temper, of generosity and compassion... He projected a joie de vivre, a life force that was almost tangible.' 'Yes he was a legend,' Lady Carina, his wife, adds in her Afterword; 'A genius larger than life with a generosity of spirit that knew no bounds.' To Wilfred, his son, he was simply 'the greatest broadcaster who ever lived'. As for Lady Carina herself she has been, in the opinion of her sons

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Frost was an effective interviewer because he was never combative — hence the famous admission of failure that he extracted from Nixon in 1974 (above) and from Blair in 2003

‘the most amazing wife, the most amazing mother’.

Poor Hegarty never had the good fortune personally to meet this saintly and legendary genius, to be greeted by him with his familiar cry ‘Super to see you!’ Instead, he says he has ‘absorbed his life osmotically’ by watching him on TV and talking to those who knew and admired him like the famous publisher Naim Attallah, who recalls lunching with Frost regularly in the Hyde Park hotel at the beginning of the grouse-shooting season in August:

He would eat his grouse with his hands, and it would get all over his face and his tie; and such a man is genuine — there is no hypocrisy. He loved women, and so do I.

Reading such encomia I feel no shame in admitting to having been one of those who mercilessly made fun of Frost throughout his career — and who can be dismissed by Hegarty as privileged snobs who envied the great genius for his success. But it wasn’t snobbery that lay behind the scorn; simply a healthy suspicion of an unconcealed lust for money and fame. That he lived in a different world from his fellow *That Was the Week* satirists was noted by Willie Rushton early on in their collaboration, when the TW3 team flew to Ireland for a TV appearance. As the plane prepared to land Willie saw Frost, who was obviously anticipating a press reception, consulting a little notebook entitled ‘Airport Quips’.

After those early satirical programmes pioneered by Ned Sherrin, Frost slowly emerged from his grubby chrysalis as a glamorous international celebrity who made a new and different name for himself as a TV interviewer, specialising in politics. In this role he has more recently been transformed into the protagonist of

He watched the Frost/Nixon film so often that he could mouth the lines from his seat in the stalls

the *Frost/Nixon* play (and film), which apparently he watched so often that according to his friend Alastair Campbell he was able to mouth the lines from his seat in the stalls.

Unlike the Paxmans and Humphreys Frost was an effective interviewer because he was never combative, hence the famous admission of failure that he extracted from Nixon in 1974. ‘It was a big risk,’ Frost said afterwards; ‘people predicted that it wouldn’t be possible to get Nixon to say anything that wasn’t self-serving.’ He didn’t see that Nixon’s admission ‘I let down my country’ was as self-serving as everything else he said, and that it did Nixon a power of good as well as bringing him (and also Frost) a welcome stash of money. Both men benefited, thus confirming the opinion of Clive James (quoted here): ‘Frost and Nixon are remarkably similar... they understood each other well.’

A more considerable achievement came

some years later on Al Jazeera, when he cleverly extracted a two-word admission of failure from Tony Blair, by referring to the Iraq invasion of 2003 in a subtly casual manner.

DF: But so far it’s been, you know, pretty much of a disaster.

TB: It has, but you see what I say to people....

Too late, Blair tried to talk his way out of the trap, but he was caught and had admitted for the first time that his intervention side by side with Bush had been disastrous.

Who was then the gentleman?

David Horspool

Now Is the Time

by Melvyn Bragg

Sceptre, £18.99, pp. 357,

ISBN9781473614529

Spectator Bookshop, £16.99

Considering that it was, as Melvyn Bragg rightly puts it, ‘the biggest popular uprising ever experienced in England’, the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 hasn’t proved particularly attractive to writers of historical fiction. Pierce Egan, better known for his essays on boxing, wrote an inter-

minable novel called *Wat Tyler* in 1841, and Robert Southey produced a dramatic poem of the same title which he later disavowed. William Morris took another hero of the revolt, the itinerant preacher John Ball, as his inspiration for a time-travelling socialist fantasy; and that's about it.

Historians and political thinkers in the centuries after the revolt have often tried to redress the balance of the unrelentingly hostile monastic chronicles that first told the story of 1381. Bragg is firmly in that revisionist tradition, if a current that has been flowing one way for about 600 years can still be thought of as revisionist. Though he is too good a novelist to paint his villains in exclusively primary colours, the likes of the boy-king Richard II, his insufferably vain mother Joan and various councillors, by turns pusillanimous and vengeful, are all deeply unsympathetic. We first meet Joan, for example, itemising her jewels, while Richard is a stuttering fop, whose one act of courage merely inspires him to an orgy of violent retribution.

Bragg's heroes are the strong, noble Walter Tyler (Bragg eschews 'Wat', much as those who write about Thomas Paine have reclaimed his first name from opponents who dismiss him as 'Tom') and the inspirational John Ball. Bragg has made Tyler a veteran of the French wars (Egan did the same), an admirer of the King's dead father, the Black Prince, for whom he fought, and a self-possessed leader by example. Ball, meanwhile, is much as those hostile chroniclers portrayed him, but the sermons and views they found abhorrent are presented as worthy responses to intolerable conditions.

The extreme contrasts between court and country, governors and governed, is well drawn, but until the novel's most dramatic episodes, as the rebels reach London and confront Richard and his advisers, there is a strange flatness about it. This may partly be because Bragg the historian keeps shouldering aside Bragg the novelist: long Whiggish disquisitions on Magna Carta, or the rising role of English as compared to French, puncture the drama. When the rebels begin sweeping through towns on the way to the capital, Bragg's descriptions retreat into a distancing passive voice, and there is little sense of the extraordinary risk they were taking and how that might have affected their actions.

Once the drama reaches its climax, however, at the gates of London, and then in the unique confrontation between king and commoner that sealed Tyler's fate, Bragg hits his stride. If this means that Richard becomes even more dislikeable than he was in reality, then that is the novelist's prerogative. *Now Is the Time* sets out to recover one of the most dramatic episodes in English history, and, ultimately, it succeeds.



'I hope you don't mind these letters that just go on and on'

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What an absolute darling you are!

A.N. Wilson

Living On Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995

edited by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe
Chatto & Windus, £25, pp. 666,
ISBN 9780701187057
Spectator Bookshop, £22

Iris Murdoch's emotionally hectic novels have been enjoying a comeback lately, with an excellent Radio 4 dramatisation of *The Sea, the Sea*, and an equally gripping rendition, on *Woman's Hour*, of *A Severed Head*. Her books are distinguished by the rate at which her characters fall in and out of love with one another, usually leaving streams of chaos and pain behind them.

Iris's letters, especially the ones which were written before she began to write novels, were blueprints for the fiction. In one confessional epistle, to David Hicks — not the interior designer, but an Oxford chum of the same name who had become a British Council lecturer — she outlined the state of play in November 1945:

I went to live with a young man whom I did not love but whom I was sorry for because he was in love with me, and because he has a complex about women (because of a homo-

sexual past) and because he was about to be sent abroad at any moment. This was one Michael Foot of Oxford, whom you may remember. In the midst of this, the brilliant and darling Pip [Philippa] Bosanquet came to lodge at Seaforth, who was then breaking off her relations with an economics don at Balliol, called Thomas Balogh, a horribly clever Hungarian Jew. I met Thomas, fell terribly in love, and he with me, and thus involved Michael in some rather hideous sufferings...

And so on. In the course of time, having helped to break up Philippa's marriage to Michael Foot (it was M.R.D. Foot the historian, not Michael Foot the politician), Iris then had a madly passionate fling with Philippa herself. To Brigid Brophy, another lover, Iris wrote in 1960, by which time she had become a famous novelist: 'I am, I think, rather like my books.' At other points, she tells correspondents that she is a sadomasochistic male homosexual. In another letter, she confessed: 'I rather like the image of myself as Oscar Wilde.'

This doorstopper of a volume chronicles a series of passions for dreadfully boring sounding Eastern Europeans with high ideas of themselves. The letters to Raymond Queneau are sadly flat, though this

could be because they have been translated into English from her rather good schoolgirl French.

One would like to read some of the replies from her correspondents, especially from the philosopher Philippa Foot, who was in some respects her most constant and intelligent friend and correspondent, from undergraduate days until the sad closing twilight years. (A note tells us that when Iris became ill, Philippa was the only person with whom she could be left in her husband John Bayley's absence.) If we did have at least some of the correspondents' letters to set beside Iris's own, then it might be possible, from this immense volume, to see her in clearer focus.

At one point, the editors quote something written back to Iris by Hicks, when they were both in their fifties: 'Dearest Iris, By God, that was the happiest meeting with you... and I wept with pleasure on the Tube going back to the office. What an absolute darling you are!'

The funny thing is, there is probably not one of her many correspondents who would not have written the same — even Brigid Brophy, with whom Iris had a rather passionate affair, and who, for a brief period, clearly wrote Iris vitriolic letters. Iris's old philosophy tutor, Donald MacKinnon, who deeply resented his portrayal as Barney Drumm in her Irish novel, *The Red and the Green*, appears to be almost the only person in the world who ever disliked her. She was deep-

ly and instantaneously lovable. In what that lovability consisted, one would be hard put to define.

An only child of loving parents (she described her childhood as a 'perfect Trinity of love') she developed an insatiable social appetite and had an enormous acquaintance. A letter written to Philippa during the second world war, when Iris was working at the Treasury, aged 22 or 23, recorded:

I feel a bit Tchekov [sic] at the moment. Questions such as 'What is the significance of life?' which I know to be strictly meaningless assume a sort of expressive meaning. I have a great many friends in London — I have lunch or dinner with a different person every day.

Nor does she really distinguish between friends and lovers. In 1964, when she was in her mid-forties, she wrote: 'I am not at the moment in love with anyone thank God. Instead, I am sort of quasi in love with about ten of my friends.'

To one of these, the political philosopher Michael Oakeshott, she wrote: 'I hope you don't mind these letters that just go on and on.' Whether he minded them or not, he kept them, as did all these correspondents, providing a challenge for the editors. About herself, Iris was clear-sighted. She wrote to Brigid Brophy: 'I am not a great writer. Neither are you.' To Philippa Foot, she admitted, by

the late 1970s, that 'I haven't read any serious philosophy for ages.' Yet, fatefully, she accepted the invitation to give the Gifford lectures in Scotland in the 1980s, a challenge to which she was not equal, as made clear by the disastrous book based on those lectures: *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. By then, long before she developed Alzheimer's, she had begun to disintegrate as a writer.

The best letters in this collection were not written to friends but to the editor of the *Times*, and they express her dismay at what politicians were doing to the educational system. 'While we have selective universities (and non-selective universities

I am not at the moment in love with anyone, thank God. Instead, I am sort of quasi in love with about ten of my friends

are not universities), we must have selective schooling.' Her words went unheeded, and subsequent generations have tried to repair the catastrophic damage done by succeeding secretaries of state for education in the 1970s.

As someone who had the enormous privilege of knowing, and loving, Iris, I naturally fell on this book with eagerness. How the editors were meant to tackle their task, I do

not know. A slim selection of these letters, none of which are really very interesting, would have provoked the response: 'What was the point of publishing *that*?' Perhaps a great lump of a book like this was inevitable, given the length of the letters, and the extent of her correspondence. Sadly, though, although she was a prolific letter-writer, she was not a good one. This volume simply does not compare, let us say, with the letters of Ted Hughes, so beautifully edited by Christopher Reid; nor do they have the terse emotional coherence of Philip Larkin's. They are, like her novels, an incoherent emotional ramble. And in the later ones — long before her mind unravelled — they reveal the lazy non-thinking and rather bogus-sounding 'spirituality' in which she liked to indulge. 'I certainly don't think Christ is to save us/ everyone — I guess that Buddha will save more (and what about Krishna)...' I should love to know if this means anything.

Yet she was not only a lovable being; she had also a very distinctive imagination. That almost-genius was on display in the best of her novels, such as *The Bell*, *The Sea*, *the Sea* and *Bruno's Dream*, but it is not shown here. 'Darling, was I awful last night?', she asks Brophy in one of her shorter notes. 'Dear girl, you are so necessary.' Reading these words, I can hear Iris's voice so clearly. It reminds me of a letter which I received from a friend

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after Iris had died, which quoted Auden's lines on Yeats: 'You were silly like us; your gift survived it all', and I remember thinking — 'Yes, OK, we may be silly, but surely not *that* bloody silly.' Iris's 'gift' survives in the best half dozen or so novels. The silliness survives in the letters.

O worship the king

Michela Wrong

King of Kings: The Triumph and Tragedy of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia

by Asfa-Wossen Asserate,

translated by Peter Lewis

Haus Publishing, £20, pp. 374,

ISBN 978910376140

Spectator Bookshop, £18

Great men rarely come smaller than Haile Selassie. In photographs, the golden crowns, pith helmets and grey felt homburgs he often donned can't conceal the fact that he is the shortest man in the room. It didn't matter: for the 44 years of his reign — with a five-year interruption engineered by Benito Mussolini's invading troops — he was effectively lord of all he surveyed.

Ethiopia's current government, established by a former Marxist rebel group, has always harboured mixed feelings towards Tafari Makonnen, as he was baptised. But for his countrymen he looms like a colossus, remembered for dragging his vast empire from feudalism into the modern age, and as a symbol of anti-colonialism who shamed the League of Nations for failing to stand up to fascism and went on to found the Organisation of African Unity.

Enigmatic, arrogant and aloof, he pulled off the paradoxical feat of being both a radical reformer and a hidebound dictator who insisted on the literalism of the title 'Elect of God' and came to be worshipped as a deity himself by the Rastafarian movement.

A full-scale biography has been missing up till now, perhaps because the emperor recorded a detailed, if partial, memoir with the British historian Edward Ullendorff. This latest account, translated from German, is particularly welcome because Asfa-Wossen Asserate, a prince by birth, is Haile Selassie's great nephew. His nobleman father went from rallying support for the emperor during a first failed coup in 1960 to begging his ageing leader to abdicate, and was finally one of 60 officials executed during a second, successful coup which ushered in a military dictatorship. So in theory this is that precious thing: an African history written by an insider.

Initially, however, the author fails to deliver on that promise of privileged access. While highly critical of accounts penned by the likes of the Polish reporter Ryszard Kapus-



Elect of God, Conquering Lion of Judah and King of Kings, c.1930

THE BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY

cinski and Evelyn Waugh, Asfa-Wossen fails to provide a written Ethiopian perspective to correct these outsiders' viewpoints. That material, he says, simply doesn't exist, the archives of the imperial palace having been 'dispersed to the four winds' by succeeding regimes. Thankfully, Asfa-Wossen's own memories — he was a teenager when two charismatic army officers first tried to topple Haile Selassie — kick in halfway through the

Ministers would bow to the telephone when taking a call from the King of Kings

book, along with accounts of conversations with exiled former aides and ministers.

The result — once you discount a couple of passages in which the author tells us far more about what various dignitaries wore and said during key ceremonies than any reader wants to know — is a tautly written, remarkably even-handed account of successful autocracy.

I particularly relished the portrait of daily life in Menelik Palace, which seems to have shared a great deal with Louis XIV's Versailles. For anyone nursing hopes of advancement, putting in an appearance was vital, and the phrase 'letting your face be slapped' was coined to describe the art of 'doing anything, however drastic, to ensure that the emperor

or noticed you'. Parliamentary democracy didn't really stand a chance in an environment where ministers would bow to the telephone when taking a call from the Lion of Judah, King of Kings. 'To the bitter end, Haile Selassie never had the slightest intention of rowing back from absolutist rule,' comments the author.

Overall, Haile Selassie's reign was an object lesson in political survival. Like Kenya's President Daniel arap Moi, he managed to outmanoeuvre a cabal of kingmakers who originally chose him for his perceived weakness. Like Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko, he proved a master of divide-and-rule, not only keeping his nobles busy competing against one another but successfully playing Washington and Moscow off against one another during the Cold War years.

It was an adroitness the emperor appeared to lose in his eighties, sitting inert in his palace as tens of thousands of peasants died of famine, students rioted in the streets and his army, itching for change, turned against him. Without blinking an eye, he allowed his loyal prime minister and closest aides to be arrested one by one until his own turn inevitably came. Puzzlingly, Asfa-Wossen makes no mention of the probable reason for his paralysis: the dementia commented on by a former American aide, John Spencer.

Perhaps he thought it disrespectful

to dwell on an elderly relative's mental decline. But it leaves a question unanswered at the end of this pacy, compelling account: how did one of Africa's most wily politicians allow himself to be so easily outflanked in the end?

Long nights of delicious horror

Josephine Livingstone

The thick of autumn is upon us, dear reader, and with it the shivers. Around Hallowe'en you may be tempted to go and see yet another edition of *Paranormal Activity* (a quotation from the trailer: 'There's, like, obviously something going on here') or something similar. Do not. There is nothing frightening about going to the movies. You are there with a crowd of other human beings, doing something fun and communal. This is not scary. If you're serious about engaging with the spirit of the season, the thing to do is to stay up late alone, in bed, reading a terrifying book. Fortunately, the bookshop shelves are currently creaking under the weight of exactly that. Here are some of the most delicious horrors lately made available on the printed page.

William Gay died in 2012, but this year publishes a book called *Little Sister Death* (Faber, £12.99, pp. 240). Sadly, this was not written posthumously (how good a zombie-penned book would be!), but rather has been reconstructed from his manuscripts. You may have heard of Gay's novel *The Long Home*, currently being adapted for the screen by James Franco. *Little Sister Death* is inspired by the legend of the Bell witch of Tennessee, a nasty episode from the early 19th century in which one John Bell was harassed by a rude and mysterious voice emanating apparently from his house. In Gay's version, a nice young family from Chicago rents a spooky house so that the dad can write a scary book about it. Little does the dad know that he is the protagonist in a scary book about the house already. It's a very neat setup, making for a very frightening haunted-house story. There are also many snakes in it: a cheap strategy, but an effective one.

If the shotguns and Spanish moss of Southern Gothic remain too camp to frighten you, two longer novels from colder climes may work. *The Undesired* (Hodder, £14.99, pp. 368) by the Icelandic novelist Yrsa Sigurðardóttir bears some oddly close resemblances to TV Scandi-drama: the protagonist works in municipal government, and the horror, when it comes, is all the nastier for taking place in the most banal of environments. The translation is a little clunky ('Lara had fallen out of a window of

her flat and his life had undergone a transformation'), but the writing is undisguisably good.

Also genuinely frightening is Catriona Ward's *Rawblood* (Weidenfeld, £14.99, pp. 320), a long, time-hopping account of a single family's horrible curse. Like the best classic Gothic novels (*Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Castle of Otranto*), *Rawblood* relies on partially informed narrators telling their own stories in a 'diary'. As a meta-examination of the Gothic genre (it's mostly set in the 19th century) and as a straightforward tale of grisly haunting, Ward's novel is remarkably successful.

Short stories are never quite as frightening as full-length works (*pace* M.R. James). The faint of heart may still enter into the seasonal spirit by enjoying two new story collections, John Connolly's *Night Music: Nocturnes 2* (Hodder, £14.99, pp. 464) and Audrey Niffenegger's *Ghost-*

If you are serious about engaging in the spirit of Hallowe'en, stay up late alone, in bed, reading a terrifying book

ly (Vintage, £14.99, pp. 464). The first is a sequel to Connolly's 2004 compendium of nasties, *Nocturnes*, and offers a similarly heterogeneous assortment. Some are horrible, some are just clever. The first story, in which a lonely bookworm witnesses the suicide of an oddly familiar-looking lady in the English countryside (do the words 'red handbag' ring any bells?), may be the best.

Niffenegger, author of the not terribly scary *The Time Traveler's Wife*, has assembled an array of tales of the spirit world which range from the classic — Edgar Allan Poe, Edith Wharton, P.G. Wodehouse — to the contemporary — A.S. Byatt,

Neil Gaiman. The stories are also illustrated by Niffenegger, whose eerily muted palette and stilted line you may have seen in her illustrated novel *The Three Incestuous Sisters*.

Gillian Flynn's new story, *The Grown-up* (Weidenfeld, £3.99, pp.80), is also short. This is a story with a child at its centre: alas, this child is not cute. Flynn's plotting is so tight that the tale reads like a very short movie treatment, but it works better, in fact, than her novels. *Gone Girl* examines the logical conclusion of gendered marital duplicity and is therefore horrifying, but it is also, by the same token, kind of silly. The short story is too lean and stark a form for silliness. Stories should be taut but humming with ambiguity, and *The Grown-up* is both.

This year, as every year, however, you would be best off picking up Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*. Carter's classic collection of warped fairytales has just been reissued to celebrate the 75th anniversary of her birth (Penguin, £10.55, pp. 176 — with a new introduction by Kelly Link, who also has a story in Audrey Niffenegger's *Ghostly*). All of the above fright-peddlers owe Carter an enormous debt, especially those with young female narrators whose sexuality informs the nature of the horror they describe (Catriona Ward, Gillian Flynn). Helen Simpson pointed out a few years ago Carter's own debt to the luxurious ghastliness of Charles Perrault (1628–1703) and the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814). For now, however, I think we may see her as an original force who still hovers over the scary-book genre, reminding us just how good the paranormal story can be.

Happy reading — and enjoy the long nights while they last.

In Other Eyes

Someone to trust with parcels, because he's 'always in'; the character who locks the gate at night and lingers to make that one-too-many joke; who isn't sure sometimes what has issued from the opening of his mouth; whose wet shoe lets out a squeal as he fills the kettle with a rising note; one of those lonely bigots, perhaps — remnant of a lost or withered habitat — part of the daylight burial of the living old.

— Ian Harrow

ARTS SPECIAL

Of gods and men

Tom Holland on Egypt, where the deities were born and history itself began

Over the stupefyingly long course of Egyptian history, gods have been born and they have died. Some 4,000 years ago, amid the chaos that marked the fragmentation of the original pharaonic state, an incantation was inscribed on the side of a coffin. It imagined a time when there had been nothing in existence save a single divine Creator. 'I was alone in the emptiness,' the god proclaimed, 'and could find no place to stand.' Nevertheless, beside him, he could feel the gods that were yet to exist. 'They were with me, these deities waiting to be born. I came into being and Becoming became.' The gods emerged, to reign first on earth and then in the heavens, and history began.

Outside Egypt itself, the British Museum is as good a place as any to trace their evolution: how, for millennia, temples were raised in their honour, and rituals performed. What happened to them, though, that eventually they came to fade and be forgotten? A new exhibition at the museum, *Egypt: faith after the pharaohs*, explores this momentous question. Certainly, as the show makes clear, the extinction of native rule in Egypt did not spell the immediate death of her ancestral gods. Instead, under first the Persians, then the Greeks, and finally the Romans, they endured as they had ever done, seemingly immortal. Whether in their temples or painted on the walls of tombs, the same portraits were reproduced century after century: of Isis, the divine mother feeding Horus, her baby son, or of Horus himself, grown to manhood and sporting the head of a hawk, or of Anubis, jackal-headed protector of the dead.

Not only did Egypt's conquerors make sure to parade their respect for the country's gods, but they added to its pantheon. The greatest temple in Alexandria, a city founded on the Mediterranean by a Macedonian king, was raised in honour of Serapis, a deity who combined a thoroughly Greek beard and robe with a primordially Egyptian lineage. Artificially multicultural he may have been — but the popularity of his cult, still going strong centuries after Egypt's absorption into the Roman Empire, potently demonstrated just how fecund the country remained as a womb of gods.

Already, though, his doom was brewing. 'On all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.' To the Jews, redemption from bondage to Pharaoh constituted the founding myth of their very identity, and the god who had supposedly brought it about was enshrined by them as one who ruled supreme, omnipotent and alone. Nevertheless, that had not prevented large numbers of them from settling in the land of their former servitude, and in Alexandria particularly. There, they existed in highly ambivalent relation to their pagan neighbours: translating the Bible into Greek, but also periodically engaging in the

mob violence for which the city was notorious. Indeed, so prone was Alexandria to sectarian rioting that on occasion even Caesars were obliged to intervene. 'I urge you all, Jews and Greeks alike, to stop this ruinous and obstinate hatred you have for each other.' So wrote the Emperor Claudius in AD 41, in a tone of evident exasperation.

To this combustible mix, the emergence of Christianity added a further element. The Church Fathers of Egypt were celebrated for the sophistication of their theology, and their followers — the Copts, as they would come to be called — for the histrionic quality of their devotion to Christ. The conversion of Constantine to Christianity, which for the first time placed Egypt under a ruler who disavowed the country's traditional gods, spelt ultimate ruin for their cults. In 391, a mob of Christians stormed the great temple of Serapis. Its 750-year-old cult statue was hacked to pieces, its scrolls destroyed, and its various buildings either converted into churches or left as mouldering shells. Alexandria, once the intellectual powerhouse of paganism, was reconsecrated as something new: as 'the most glorious and Christ-loving city of the Alexandrians'.

By the 6th century, when a shrine of Ra, the sun god, was closed down in an isolated Libyan oasis, the worship of Egypt's ancient gods had been pushed into extinction. Egyptian Christianity, meanwhile, had entered a dazzling golden age. Its tradition of inquiry into the nature of God was uniquely brilliant and searching. Its monks blazed a trail of asceticism that the entire Christian world would end up following. Its cataloguing of the books of the New Testament proved definitive. Simultaneously, though, its relish for theological controversy remained as swaggering as ever. The Bishop of Alexandria, with imperious immodesty, took to calling himself the 'Judge of the Universe' — but others, less flatteringly, labelled him 'a new pharaoh'. Divisions about how the nature of Christ was properly to be defined split the Egyptian church, and set its leaders at loggerheads with Caesar himself. In September 642, when a warband of Arabs seized control of Alexandria from the Romans, one bishop had no doubt who was to blame for the disaster: it was, so he declared, God's punishment for 'the wickedness of the emperor, and his persecutions'.

If so, then He had exacted a high price indeed. The Arab conquerors, like the Jews and the Christians, looked back on Pharaoh as the very archetype of idolatry; but they also regarded the Bible itself as corrupted, and boasted of a scripture, the Quran, that constituted the seal of revelations. Islam, as it evolved over the last centuries of the first millennium AD, would not be lacking in an Egyptian flavour. The Quran itself contained palpable echoes of episodes from Coptic gospels, while the oldest surviving life of Muhammad, the prophet to whom it



Standing figure of the ancient Egyptian god Horus, wearing Roman military costume, 1st–2nd century AD



Seated figure of the ancient Egyptian god Horus, wearing Roman military costume, 1st–2nd century AD

had supposedly been revealed, was written in Egypt. By the year 1,000, the country had become a veritable powerhouse of Islamic civilisation: home to stunning mosques, exquisite calligraphy, and an entire new capital, dazzling and puissant, by the name of Cairo. To this day, the great university founded there in 972, Al-Azhar, remains the most celebrated and influential in the entire Muslim world.

Few today, looking not just at Egypt but at the entire Middle East, would doubt the pressing relevance of this remarkable span of history. How timely it is, then, that the British Museum should have put on what is a quite brilliant exhibition to explicate it. Beginning with a head of Augustus and ending with a letter written by Maimonides, the 12th-century Jewish philosopher, it compresses an astonishingly complex process of change in a way that is simultaneously accessible and sophisticated. While there are few objects here with the immediate impact of, say, a colossal head of Ramesses II, the curators have taken full advantage of Egypt's incomparable ability to preserve what in other climates would soon have rotted away. Everything from a child's sock to a

Coptic curtain is on display — with manuscripts enjoying particular pride of place. If you want to see the actual letter written by Claudius to the Alexandrians, or the oldest copy of the Nicene Creed in existence, or fragments of lost gospels fit to inspire the plot of a Dan Brown novel, then this exhibition is the one to visit.

Most fascinating of all, though, is the opportunity it provides to trace elements of continuity through a millennium's worth of

If you want to see fragments of the lost gospels fit to inspire Dan Brown, this is the exhibition to visit

jolting change. The theme is established in the very first room, with two splendid statues of Horus — hawk's head and all — dressed in Roman military uniform; but it continues throughout the show. We see an amulet with Anubis on one side and Gabriel on the other; a spell that invokes both Ra and Moses; a Coptic cross flanked by Cupids. To look on these is to feel both the aeons of time that constitute the sweep of Egyptian history, and how, at certain moments and places, they can seem to shrink almost to nothing.

Lady Duff-Gordon, writing from Cairo in the 19th century, once commented that 'the Christianity and the Islam of this country are full of the ancient worship'. She was echoing, albeit unwittingly, the presumption articulated by the incantation written on the side of the coffin some 4,000 years ago: that the gods worshipped by Egyptians have always been implicit in Egypt's beginnings. The fascination of this show is the degree to which it simultaneously undermines and supports such a conclusion. The questions that it raises — the degree to which monotheism is inherently intolerant, whether Christians and Muslims can co-exist in peace, and the relationship of theocracy to state power — are certainly not exclusive to the period that it covers. The last major exhibition that the British Museum will put on under the directorship of Neil MacGregor, *Faith after the pharaohs* is a worthy last hurrah: intelligent and fascinating, it constitutes a mirror held up to a crucial period of history, and to present circumstances as well.

Egypt: faith after the pharaohs is at the British Museum until 7 February 2016.



'Street Kids', c.1949–51, by Joan Eardley

Exhibitions

Hanging offence

Claudia Massie

Modern Scottish Women: Painters and Sculptors 1885–1965

Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, until 26 June 2016

Modern Scottish Men, a new exhibition celebrating the achievements of male artists in the 20th century, opens next month in Edinburgh. Men only; no women. Bold! Only joking. That show would never happen today. How could it? Where would an exclusive, specifically male-only exhibition be tolerated these days? A women-only show, on the other hand, would be fair enough; we need to point out that the wee dears can paint too. And so we have *Modern Scottish Women: Painters and Sculptors 1885–1965*. Should we perhaps be feeling patronised, ladies?

The recent death of Brian Sewell has again thrown up his old allegations regarding the inferiority of women artists. 'Only men are capable of aesthetic greatness,' he said, and the art market would appear to support his position by stoutly refusing to take any great

interest in work by female artists. A Georgia O'Keeffe sold for \$44.4 million last year, which seems a lot until you consider that two years previously, the market had seen fit to lavish \$118 million on a thoroughly bland Modigliani.

Examine the catalogue of most expensive artwork. In February this year, somebody paid nearly \$300 million for one of Gauguin's Tahitian pieces. A length or two behind are Cézanne, Rothko, Picasso and Pollock. Painters of greater or lesser ability fall in below them but not one of them is female, until you reach O'Keeffe. It was not until 2004, more than 30 years since the bloated market began throwing millions at works by men, that something by a living female artist, Marlene Dumas, scraped \$1 million at auction.

The market is only part of the story. It operates according to its own purpose, and is, evidently, no great arbiter of quality. What other mechanism would rank Barnett Newman above Titian? What is important, and what endures, is not the market value of an artwork but the work itself. The market merely skews perception among those who cannot be bothered to look for themselves.

John Berger summarised much of art history as crude objectification: 'Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.' Simplistic though this is, when female artists began exhibiting paintings of male nudes it was considered a shocking inversion of tradition. A fine nude, awkward and emaciated, by Joan Eardley in the *Modern Scottish Women* show illustrates this progression; she presents a real man, closer to Egon Schiele than the heroic torsos of the Renaissance.

Beyond painting men as objects, the feminist response was to turn the lens, or canvas, on themselves. Judy Chicago and Suzanne Lacy led the way in the 1970s with tortuous performances of writhing naked women smeared in blood and muck, accompanied by audio accounts of rape. The work was born out of a determination to subvert the orthodoxy and to that extent it worked.

The unfortunate outcome was not a greater respect for women artists, however, but a generation of art made by women that became depressingly solipsistic. The feminist artist maintains a profile in the public consciousness as a straight-fringed fury, sewing tampons on to bras. This disproportionate appreciation has been fed by media fixation on Tracey Emin's bed and Sarah Lucas's entire catalogue. Yet despite the female members of the YBA bubble, it is worth noting that only five of the 30 Turner Prizes have gone to women.

Women are sold short by artists who claim to speak on their behalf. They are, obviously, discrete individuals and the idea of women's art as something homogenous is ridiculous. Nobody is a 'good woman artist', but either a good artist or a poor one. Brian Sewell was wrong to assert that there

The feminist artist is perceived by the public as a straight-fringed fury, sewing tampons on to bras

have been no great women artists, a claim he was far from alone in making. In truth, there have been very few great artists of either sex but certainly some of both. What was Artemisia Gentileschi if not a great painter? If the impressionists are to be classified as greats, Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt must stand among them. And Frida Kahlo was one of the most extraordinary of all.

Where women can be roughly grouped is in the obstacles they encountered. None of these — children, domestic obligation, historically limited access to formal education — is unique to art but they help to explain women's diminished presence in galleries. Highlighting the impact of limited opportunities and the reaction of a sceptical patriarchal establishment to women's art is a central element of the *Modern Scottish Women* show, and it is the necessary bit. The quality of work by these artists is not in doubt. Anne Redpath is an acknowledged leader of mid-century British art, while the work on display by Wilhelmina Barns-Graham compares favourably with any Ben Nicholson. The less illustrious artists are also compelling. Norah Neilson Gray and Bessie MacNicol may be unfamiliar to most visitors, but their paintings will impress with their tonal harmony and soft, painterly modelling.

Scotland has been particularly well furnished with female artists of outstanding ability but it is still worth explaining why women have been exhibited less than men, and appreciated below them. It is opportunity, not ability, that has held women back historically, something that *Modern Scottish Women* demonstrates with lucidity and confidence. The exhibition is not patronising; it is informative and revealing. The depressing thing is not that it exists but that, until everyone who shares Sewell's prejudice has joined him through the pearly gates, it still needs to exist.

the nature of home

Robina Jack • Guy Taplin



Robina Jack: Crow – Jug

slip decorated, high earthenware with a transparent glaze
22 x 19 x 16 cms 8⁵/₈ x 7¹/₂ x 6¹/₄ ins



Guy Taplin: Starlings

carved and painted driftwood
33 x 36 x 19 cms 13 x 14¹/₈ x 7¹/₂ ins



Robina Jack: Brown Hen – Bowl

slip decorated, high earthenware with a transparent glaze
40 x 40 x 4 cms 15⁵/₈ x 15⁵/₈ x 2³/₄ ins



Guy Taplin: Swifts and Young – Panel

carved and painted driftwood
51 x 50 x 15 cms 19⁷/₈ x 19⁵/₈ x 5⁷/₈ ins



Robina Jack: Hare Bells – Tray

slip decorated, high earthenware with a transparent glaze
36 x 41 x 9 cms 14¹/₈ x 16¹/₈ x 3¹/₂ ins



Guy Taplin: Wrens and Worm

carved and painted driftwood
20 x 30 x 12 cms 7⁵/₈ x 11⁵/₈ x 4³/₄ ins



Robina Jack: Tiger on the Paisley – Dish

slip decorated, high earthenware with a transparent glaze
25 x 29 x 3 cms 9⁷/₈ x 11³/₈ x 1¹/₈ ins



Guy Taplin: Wheatears

carved and painted driftwood
20 x 24 x 19 cms 7⁷/₈ x 9¹/₄ x 7¹/₂ ins



Robina Jack: Parlour Tea Clipper – Dish

slip decorated, high earthenware with a transparent glaze
27 x 26 x 4 cms 10⁵/₈ x 10¹/₄ x 1¹/₈ ins

Emily Dickinson, one of Guy Taplin's favourite poets, once wrote to a friend: "I hope you love birds too. It is economical. It saves going to heaven."

This sentiment inspired the theme Guy and Robina Jack chose for the heart of their new joint exhibition at Messum's. Their Essex gardens are now nature reserves, and together with countless other feeding stations help create a wild abundance of birds, regenerating natural environments that have been starved out of a farm-efficient countryside.

Ian Collins
Writer and curator

Fully illustrated catalogue and price list £15 inc p&p

Exhibition 11th – 27th November

MESSUM'S

Intelligent design

Stephen Bayley

The World of Charles and Ray Eames

Barbican Art Gallery, until 14 February 2016

Peter Mandelson, in his moment of pomp, had his portrait taken by Lord Snowdon. He is sitting on a fine modern chair. Mandy would no doubt have been aware of the ancient historic associations, through bishoprics and universities, that chairs have with power. Since it is a chair much admired by architects, Mandy also looks quite cool, although these things are relative.

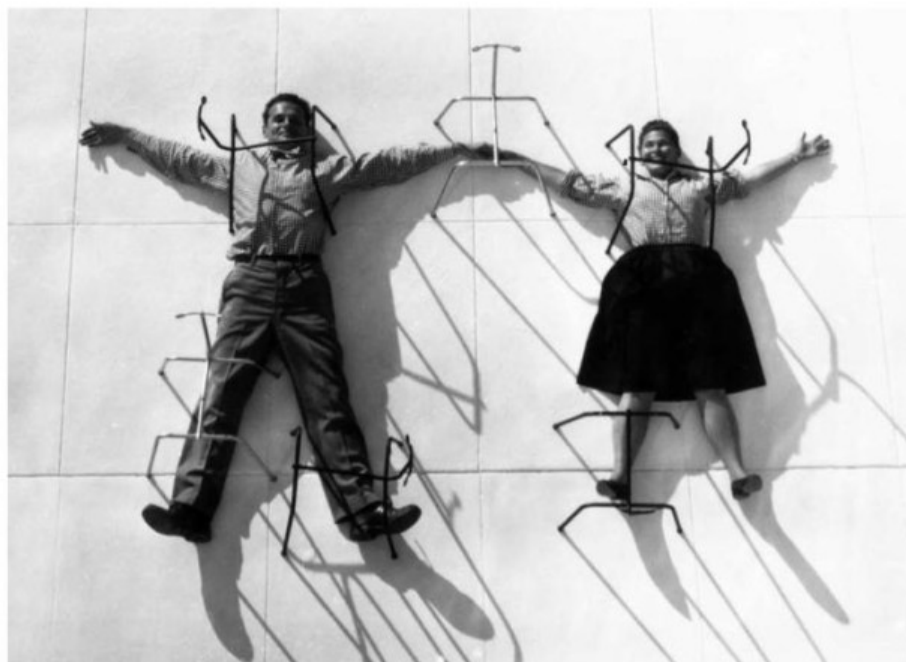
The chair and its footstool are known as Eames Lounge 670 and Eames Ottoman 671, and they were first manufactured in 1956 by Herman Miller of Zeeland, Michigan. Curved plywood shells are veneered with Brazilian rosewood, upholstered with shallow black leather-studded cushions and supported, at a meaningful tilt (suggestive of relaxed authority), on a stellar metal support.

It is a conceptual and manufacturing masterpiece and has become the most famous chair ever. Its designers were Charles (1907–1978) and Ray Eames (1912–1988). In any setting, the presence of an Eames chair suggests an impressive level of designery taste. This Mandy wanted to appropriate at the dawn of his millennium. Hundreds of cheap knock-offs are available: sure evidence that the Eames mystique has leaked out of the design stratosphere.

A new exhibition at the Barbican is a comprehensive retrospective with a gorgeous range of objects and ephemera illustrating the Eames's astonishingly rich and productive life. Its fine and spare installation by 6a Architects makes the very best of a forbidding space.

In the same way that Jackson Pollock became the Great American Painter, the Eameses became the Great American Designers, fulfilling a national appetite for home-grown heroes in the face of a wave of European imports. Charles was born in St Louis, worked in a steel mill and wore butch wash'n'wear plaid shirts. Later, with growing cosmopolitanism came more sophisticated bow ties: he was alert to self-image. Charles passed through architecture school, won a competition in 'organic' design in New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1940 and six years later was the first designer to have a one-man show there. MoMA was modernism's Vatican; Charles had been blessed by the Pope and the 'designer' phenomenon was born.

In those days, 'organic' meant sensible, rational and humane rather than Zaha's megalomaniac blobs. For example, Charles used his knowledge of bending plywood to make splints for the US Navy in the second world war. He used his knowledge of welding to make elegant frames for the glass-



Hot seats: Charles and Ray Eames posing with chair bases

fibre seating tubs he pioneered: one aim was to make 'high-performance materials available at non-military prices'.

Charles had met his wife and lifetime collaborator, Ray, at Cranbrook Academy, the outstanding Michigan art school where fine, imported European design wisdom meshed with the mighty gears of American industry.

In a brilliant career move, the Eameses built themselves a house in Santa Monica in 1949 using off-the-shelf industrial components. It became a home, a shrine and a collective. Here Charles, not at all resistant to publicity, was memorably photographed welding and sawing by Herbert Matter: the litany and ico-

Just as Jackson Pollock became the Great American Painter, the Eameses became the Great American Designers

nography of the designer as can-do creator were essential to an emerging mythology.

The famous Eames chair was designed with Hollywood's Billy Wilder in mind. They had got to know each other when Charles directed the second unit on Wilder's *Spirit of St Louis*, film being another of his preoccupations. With splendid razzmatazz, the chair was presented on NBC's *Today Show*. 'We are in Noo York to introduce a noo chair,' Charles, now in bow tie, says on the ancient scratchy videotape that survives.

Ray looks like a smiley American Gothic matron in her trademark wide skirts. 'We have never designed for a fashion or a market,' the male Eames explained with genial earnestness. (This when Detroit teased the car owner's cupidity with cynical and meaningless annual design changes.) 'Well, that is quite a departure, Charles!' NBC's hostess cooed. She

then splendidly described Charles's vocation: to move freely in a world of unlimited opportunity with intelligence and taste.

Established as the Great American Designers, in 1959 the Eameses were responsible for the American National Exhibition in Moscow. This was the theatre for the 'kitchen debates' between Khrushchev and Nixon, a Cold War set piece where the stand-off was between fridges and dishwashers, not thermonuclear weapons. This conflict the Americans won and they confirmed the USSR's humiliation by recording the event in the new colour video.

After the famous Eames chair, in 1958 the 'Aluminium Group' office furniture appeared. It has never been bettered and nor will it be until someone discovers a new material or human anatomy is decisively changed, each unlikely. And never has anyone been a better exemplar of 'the designer'. They had imagination, charm, humour and a keen practical sense. Charles had an eclectic eye and, fascinated by play, was an inspired educator. 'I visited a good toy store this morning,' he once said. 'It was sick-making.' He was distrustful of affluence. Terence Conran, never one to defer to others, told me that Charles had 'the wit, style and ingenuity I so desperately wanted to emulate'.

They travelled widely. Charles knew London well, thought the black cab the best design ever, and charmed an adoring circle of admirers including Reyner Banham, Peter and Alison Smithson and, of all people, Tony Benn. On display is a poem about Charles written by Benn in 1961. If Benn's Ministry of Technology had actually been inspired by the Eames's superior practical intelligence we would all by now be better off. But, like Mandy, he was faking it.

Unreliable evidence

Lara Prendergast

Burden of Proof: The Construction of Visual Evidence

The Photographers' Gallery, until 10 January 2016

I hadn't really thought much about pixels before, despite spending a large portion of my day looking at them. After all, a pixel is just a tiny unit in a digital image, and we all tend to look at the bigger picture. But how about this: this humble unit has now become a key feature of drone warfare. Drone-fired missiles have reportedly been developed that can burrow through targeted buildings, and leave a hole that appears smaller than a pixel on publicly available satellite images. This means that drone strikes are often invisible to groups who try to monitor attacks, such as NGOs or the UN.

As Eyal Weizman, an expert in 'forensic architecture', puts it: 'One of the foundational principles of forensics since the 19th century has been inverted: to resolve a crime the police should be able to see more, use better optics, than the perpetrator of the crime. Here, it is the state agencies that do the killing and the independent organisations the forensics. The differential in visual capacity to see is the space of denial.'

I now can't stop thinking about pixels, and it's all thanks to a small and intriguing exhibition at the Photographers' Gallery called *Burden of Proof: The Construction of Visual Evidence*. It sets out to examine the ability of photographic images to document violent, criminal acts, and uses 11 diverse case studies from the past 100 years to ask questions about whether photographs can ever convey objective truth.

In the early 20th century, when photography was in its nascent state, it was considered an impartial technique for investigation. Alphonse Bertillon, a French police officer and biometrics researcher, developed a protocol for its use in criminal investigations, which became known as 'metric photography'. A camera with a

wide-angle lens was suspended on a tripod over the corpse, in order to establish the position within the crime scene. At the time, this was considered scientific, but to a modern eye, these images look deliciously macabre, and the way they are framed is quite attractive. They are full of tantalising details, and we are left to imagine why — and how — characters such as Monsieur Mathieu, Madame Laurent and Monsieur Delorme were bumped off.

The veracity of photography is the main

and after aerial photographs of large-scale offensives from the second world war aren't that revealing — or at least not to the untrained eye. At times, the show feels like a rather bitty university lecture delivered by an enthusiastic but scatterbrained professor. Plenty of interesting stuff, but it's pretty erratic.

Images of the Turin Shroud and of Josef Mengele's skull are also included. Both items are equally ghoulish. The shroud, which supposedly showed the 'narrative of the passion', is billed as the 'first crime photograph' — sensationalist enough — but this was all discredited in 1986, when the photographic methods used to reach this conclusion were disproved by carbon dating. The archbishop of Turin had to announce sheepishly that the shroud did not date back to Christ's time, but instead to 1260–1390 AD. With Mengele's skull, a videographic technique was used to determine whether a skeleton found in the suburbs of São Paulo belonged to him. As Clyde Snow, a forensic expert, puts it, 'Bones make good witnesses. They never lie.' It was indeed the 'executioner of Auschwitz'.

Seen as a whole, these case studies demonstrate the paradoxical nature of photography. The camera does capture what's put in front of it — but that doesn't necessarily mean a photograph reveals the truth. As a forensic tool, it is fallible. And nowhere is photography more fallible than when it comes to the pixel. The photos of rotting corpses and mangled, bruised cadavers are

grim to look at, and play to our modern-day obsession with graphic imagery. But perhaps more unsettling is the creeping realisation that often the real evidence now lies beyond what we can see. In the digital age, photography has become an altogether different medium. Weapons are now being used that actively exploit the limitations of what we can see.

Photography was once considered an essential tool in the justice system. But if pixels can be manipulated, and the gaps between them exploited, can we really trust the bigger picture any longer? Photography can both show and hide evidence. There lies the burden.

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Murder of Monsieur Canon, Boulevard de Clichy, 9 December 1914, Alphonse Bertillon

theme — which is quite a broad one, to say the least — and the case studies don't exactly join up seamlessly. One corner of this compact show is dedicated to 200 people who lost their lives during Stalin's Great Terror. Many of those arrested during this period were tortured into confessing to crimes and conspiracies, and some were photographed in the days prior to their execution. Originally intended as a way for the executioners to confirm who had been killed, these chilling photographs now serve as damning evidence of Soviet-era state brutality.

Some of the other case studies feel more detached from the violence. Before



On song: Bob Dylan performs at the 53rd annual Grammy Awards at Staples Center in 2011; photographers are banned on his current tour

Live music

Maximum Bob

Mark Palmer

Bob Dylan
Royal Albert Hall

We were like four hapless contestants on *University Challenge*. None of us knew the answer. But just like they do on the telly, I leaned learnedly across towards my 28-year-old son, who in turn looked despairingly towards one of my stepsons, before my other stepson made his contribution with a shrug of the shoulders. So, it was up to me as captain of the team to take a guess as the first few bars wafted through the Royal Albert Hall.

“‘Tangled Up in Blue’?” I proffered with as much enthusiasm as Jeremy Corbyn at a white-tie dinner.

But, fingers on the buzzer, there were far bigger questions to be answered. Such as, what on earth were we doing turning up yet again for a Bob Dylan concert when not only did we fail to hear most of the words last time but didn’t even recognise many of the tunes?

Ah, but to paraphrase one of my favourite Dylan lines, we were so much

older then, we’re younger than that now. Never again, I had told myself two years ago, when Bob was last in town rasping like a rusting Vespa. And I felt so good about that decision. Hold on to the memories, walk away now, nothing lasts for ever. But, then, a buy-tickets-to-anything-you-want email landed in my inbox in early June, a time of year when the promise of better

*Never again, I had told myself when
Bob was last in town rasping like a
rusting Vespa*

things to come is in full bloom, and before you could say ‘Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right’, my credit card was being debited for just short of £400.

So, there we were, an assorted bunch ranging in age from 14 to 84, packing the famous hall to the rafters, all part of the same tribe. And despite the voice, and the refusal of the star man to utter a ‘thank you’ or even to introduce members of his band, we had a wonderful evening, brimming with hope and forgiveness — and I was back home in bed before the start of *Newsnight*.

The first time I saw Dylan live was in 1974 at the Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto and I still have the stub. He was 33; I was 20. He could sing then and he can sing now

— it’s just different from how it was. He’ll be 75 next May and I’d like to say he looks good on it but when you’re sitting in the gods and he’s wearing a wide-brimmed hat and the lighting is so subdued that we could be in a blacked-out New Orleans speakeasy, it’s impossible to say.

His movement around the stage was interesting. He seemed to be having trouble bending his legs, as if walking on stilts. Seated at the piano there was the occasional wiggle, a gentle stomping of his cowboy boots.

“‘All Along the Watchtower’!” shouted a man from the upper tier. No chance. “‘Desolation Row’!” called a woman clearly in some pain. Forget it. Bob’s not even angry any more. He’s just bemused and resigned to whatever might be blowing in the wind as he gets closer to knocking on heaven’s door. And we go along with it, indulging his current fad for Frank

Sinatra covers (‘Why Try To Change Me Now’ was superb) just like we did during his pious Christian evangelical phase in the late 1970s.

Many in the audience would have been in this very auditorium in May 1966 when Dylan ‘went electric’, when the ‘spokesman for a generation’ abandoned his Woody Guthrie roots, when the ‘protest singer’ plugged in and sold out. Now there is not much in the way of judgment, not from the audience and certainly not from Bob.

With his excellent five-piece band picking up the pieces, Dylan put together a gentle, free-flowing set. He doesn’t play guitar any more (arthritis, but we don’t know for sure) and the evening included a 20-minute interval during which there seemed to be more of a run on vanilla sundaes than Jack Daniel’s.

The songs washed over us, warmly. Veterans like me could look back and reflect, sprinkling some sweetener on bitter times. Then, almost abruptly, Bob sloped off, before returning for a two-song encore. One more would have been nice, an acoustic version of ‘Like A Rolling Stone’, perhaps, or, even better, ‘Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands’, from the *Blonde on Blonde* album, which lasts 11 glorious minutes.

Of course not. The lights came up and out we shuffled. Never again? Every time, actually.

Dance

Wherefore art thou Romeo?

Ismene Brown

Romeo and Juliet

Royal Ballet, in rep until 2 December

Without Stars; There We Have Been The Place

You always remember your first time, don't you? And in ballet one imagines that Juliet wants to remember her first Romeo as a thunderclap. So the Royal Ballet's director Kevin O'Hare, for reasons best known to himself, gives the most exciting new young star the Royal Ballet has seen for years the role of Juliet and... Matthew Golding as Romeo.

And so it was that Francesca Hayward's mesmerising debut in this most prized of all Royal ballerina roles will be remembered as a bomb exploding in a vacuum. This Juliet will have to hunt for a new Romeo to find her match; she will have better nights to remember than that first one, which should have been so precious. While we, the public, can only grind our teeth in frustration at such a casting cock-up.

My aspersions on the tall, fit Golding are not on his toothsoneness (who could fault toothsoneness in a Romeo?) as much as on the fact that he fits a too prevalent WYSIWYG category at the post-MacMillan Royal Ballet. Remember WYSIWYG? It was a virtue in computer software — What You See Is What You Get. But in ballet, you want rather more than you can see.

And we certainly had an eyeful from Hayward last Friday night. As Tobey Maguire said about Seabiscuit, she may be little, but she is fierce. In fact, I have never before thought of Juliet as a wilful Mafia daughter who would have been quite capable of one day ruling the Capulet family as a female Don had Romeo not gatecrashed her coming-out party. The line-up of Gary Avis's Lord Capulet, Kristen McNally's Lady Capulet, Thomas Whitehead's Tybalt, and wee, glowing, nuclear Hayward as Juliet for that tremendous pompous march struck a new match on the drama. It reminded us that the Royal Ballet is sometimes better at polishing the dramatic situation with its character-playing than at polishing stars.

Against this formidable line-up, not to mention Marcelino Sambé's sparky little Mercutio, Golding had an unremarkable ordinariness, not brilliant at dancing, good at fighting, up for sex with Juliet, and that's about it, without any dimension of poetry to arrest

one's thoughts. Hayward possibly overcompensated for the unequal pairing — one was reminded that she triumphed in her *Manon* debut months ago, so sex kitten came before innocent.

But she combines, as some of the greats do, seemingly contradictory qualities — hands and arms as light and sensitive as butterflies and a storming upper body that makes every single movement read physically, every thought tell. When she danced with

Francesca Hayward's mesmerising debut will be remembered as a bomb exploding in a vacuum

Paris, fuck you was written all over her. Hayward promises to be a thoroughly new broom in the Royal's gem-laden cupboard of ballerina roles.

Whereas surely Yasmine Naghdi and Matthew Ball will hug their first *Romeo and Juliet* their whole lives. What a dream debut for these two youngsters, a pair whose flight to private passion eclipsed a world of cynicism with their innocence. Naghdi has a rare, sombre virtuousness on stage; Ball, with his high forehead and curly hair, looked like a portrait of Philip Sidney, which compensated for some undeveloped dancing. But the closeness between them in their balcony scene marvellously showed

George Rowlett – *Moments of Light*

30 October – 27 November 2015

Kingsdown Cliffs, High Tide, Overcast Day, 2015, oil on board, 61 x 122 cm



View exhibition catalogue online at www.artspacegallery.co.uk

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two youngsters swimming in love.

The obstacles of love are popular subjects in contemporary dance, but rarely have I seen them so arrestingly translated as in James Cousins's excellent two-parter at The Place last week, *Without Stars and There We Have Been*, based on Haruki Murakami's novel *Norwegian Wood*. A triangle played out two ways — from the viewpoint of the rejected, and then that of the rejector — it would only work if Cousins could convey the physical language of apparent submission while the thoughts are somewhere else. Like Juliet with Paris, but more so.

You see why Cousins was talent-spotted by Matthew Bourne. He composes his dance-theatre with a powerful combination of body language heightened by acrobatic skill into a vivid, versatile dance, and an evident understanding of how super-sparse lighting (by Guy Hoare) and an evocative musical mix of filmic sounds and popular song (by Seymour Milton) can separate, isolate, halo and intensify the separateness of people's feelings when they're involved with each other.

Chihiro Kawasaki is the mercurially slippery girl who the hardworking Gareth Mole agonisingly loves; her thoughts drift away to a watcher in the shadows, the pony-tailed Georges Hann, with whom in part two she shares an absorbingly emotive, treacle-soft, intimately wrought duet. *Shades of Romeo and Juliet*, parted only by the dark.

Opera

Irish ayes

Alexandra Coghlan

Guglielmo Ratcliff; Koanga Wexford Festival Opera

It's Halloween, and right on lightning-flash cue enters an operatic ghost story exhumed from the grave of long-since-buried works. You couldn't hope for more discerning grave-robbers than Wexford Festival Opera, however, who have long made it their mission to bring forgotten operas back to life. Mascagni's *Guglielmo Ratcliff* is a proper blood-on-the-tartan gothic thriller, all duels, doomed lovers, fainting heroines and family curses, with a score as fleshy with tunes as the composer's more famous *Cavalleria rusticana* — think *Lucia di Lammermoor* without the fey bel canto warblings.

So why so long neglected? There are no musical mad wives lurking in *Guglielmo Ratcliff*'s attic, but there are more than a few technical demons. The vocal writing for Ratcliff himself is so unrelenting, so high-lying that only a handful of tenors have felt capable of tackling the role. Extended monologue 'Non altro che delirio' became a showpiece for José Cura, but otherwise takers for



Wild-eyed mezzo Annunziata Vestri as mad Margherita in 'Guglielmo Ratcliff'

the murderous lover's operatic vendetta have been few. Which is a criminal shame, because — as Fabio Ceresa's stylish production makes clear — this really is a classic, blending verismo's musical directness with a Romantic excess of plot and emotion.

Stripping away any kilt-wearing kitschery, designers Tiziano Santi and Giuseppe Palella drain the 19th-century setting of colour, placing us in an elegant frozen scene — a fantasy of wolfskins and white brocade where the doomed characters exist in a sort of half-life, caught between this world and the next. The stalking figure of mad Margherita (wild-eyed mezzo Annunziata Vestri) haunts the scene, drip-feeding us with ominous back story.

Yes, there's a little too much narrating and not quite enough doing (patriarch MacGregor spends most of Act I bringing the audience and daughter Maria's suitor Douglas up to speed) but when the music speaks so vividly you don't miss the visual drama. Conducted by Francesco Cilluffo, Wexford's Festival Orchestra strings swagger and brass thrust, spreading out a soundscape filled with all the colours blanched from the set.

Ratcliff stands or falls by its anti-hero, and Angelo Villari takes a fine stab at the role (as well as his love rivals). With such power, so many flashes of beauty, not to mention such endurance on display, it seems ungrateful to linger on the rougher edges and dips in intonation that occasionally blot the delivery. David Stout's Douglas — the plot's sole survivor — makes a solid vocal foil, with Mariangela Sicilia's Maria an ardent lover. Vestri's Margherita steps forward from the vocal shadows for her massive Act IV aria — a welcome contrast to the opera's male voice-dominated central section. Make sure you catch the live Radio 3 broadcast on 31 October.

If *Ratcliff* is the late-blooming star of this year's festival, then *Koanga* is the problem child. Delius's 1897 opera takes inspi-

ration from the composer's time in Florida, managing an orange plantation. The result is a work whose slavery subject-matter is so heavily spiced with voodoo mysticism, whose lofty philosophising is so bogged down in its lumpen and overloaded libretto ('Africa! Land of his fathers! Glowing in splendour with radiance gleaming') that its lush score barely stands a chance.

Koanga himself is the Oroonoko-style hero of the piece — a captured African prince, noble savage par excellence. In hopes of breaking his stubborn will, the plantation's owner José Martínez plots to marry him to seductive mulatto slave Palmyra (Nozuko Teto), only thwarted by estate manager Simon Perez who kidnaps the unwilling Palmyra for himself. Voodoo curses, death and suicide follow with undramatic haste.

Faced with such challenges, director Michael Gieleta makes a tasteful and largely effective intervention, his action framed in James Macnamara's sun-bleached box of a set. Norman Garrett's *Koanga* dominates physically, his voice a stream of legato tone that drowns all consonants in its flood, but vocally it's Teto's bright, assertive soprano that catches the ear, at its finest in conflict with Kate Allen's darker, fuller Clotilda.

But the score really is the thing here — ecstatic as only Delius can be, heavy with hazy strings and melodies that just don't quit. Much-needed rhythmic energy is provided by the catchy La Calinda, and orchestral colour supplemented by two prescient banjos that anticipate *Porgy and Bess* and its ilk by a good 40 years.

Fatally flawed but with some heroic musical moments, *Koanga* is exactly the kind of show only Wexford could — or would — dare stage. A world-class opera festival specialising in obscure rarities based in a tiny coastal town — Wexford is the ultimate Irish joke. The punchline? It's bloody brilliant.

Theatre

Character assassination

Lloyd Evans

Plaques and Tangles

Royal Court, until 21 November

Treasure

Finborough, until 14 November

Here are three truths about play-writing. A script without an interval will be structurally flawed. A vague, whimsical title means a vague, whimsical drama. And a play about Alzheimer's will self-destruct for the obvious reason that drama is an examination of character while Alzheimer's is an effacement of character, so the paint evaporates before it reaches the canvas. A fourth truth is that subsidised theatres know nothing of the first three. So that explains *Plaques and Tangles* at the Royal Court, which runs for 110 uninterrupted minutes, without the variations of mood generated by an interval, and which examines a case of early-onset dementia.

Megan is a married librarian with two kids. We watch her develop from the age of 22 to about 45 when her mind starts to go wibbly-wobbly. Playwright Nicola Wilson works hard to make Megan eccentric and attractive. She's smart, sensuous, irascible, impulsive, well-educated and fascinated by words. But she doesn't wear her erudition lightly. It wears her heavily. She discusses abstruse etymologies and the origins of proverbs. She quotes Gabriel García Márquez and early imprints of the New Oxford American Dictionary. To emphasise her lingual facility she regularly leaks into German without warrant, or translation. There's no room for fun in this portrait because, I imagine, the writer's aim is to put a 'powerful intelligent matriarch' on stage.

Wilson seems to realise that once Megan departs, the play goes with her so she postpones the valediction by flipping back into Megan's early history and by accessorising the script with expressionist platitudes. There are ghost scenes and dream sequences. There's a lecture-y bit, for schools perhaps, explaining the biochemistry of dementia. And we enjoy a Luis Buñuel moment where the actors become automatons and move jerkily backwards pretending to be stuck in a rewinding film. Megan's penultimate gesture is to wear a purple bra over her dress and to microwave 'waffles' (in fact, the family laptops). At the same time she asks her husband to join her on one last adventure. 'Learn Mandarin,' she suggests. We don't see the results of that linguistic expedition.

Wilson pads out the closing scenes with extra tragedies that can't touch Megan because she's beyond reach by this time. Her mental collapse is signalled by the famous

'grin' — a dreamy moist-eyed, slack-jawed smirk — often seen in zombie movies and in Ophelia's final 'good night, sweet ladies' scene. The 'grin' is sometimes accompanied by dribble. This play is a decent stab at an impossible subject and the writer has at least learned that turning Alzheimer's into theatre is like building a surfboard out of sawdust. A final thought. The director casts two actresses of different race to play older and younger Megan. In her twenties Megan is black and she turns white with dementia. There may be a touch of glamorous self-laceration here. Alzheimer's doesn't just curdle your noodle it turns you into an imperialist honkie bloodsucker too.

Treasure is the UK première of a Yiddish drama by David Pinski. The script, dating from 1905, has been adapted by Colin Chambers who styles himself 'a former Literary Manager of the Royal Shakespeare Company' and 'Emeritus Professor of Drama at Kingston University'. His taste for otiose superfluity spills over into his clotted, slow-motion script. It's a simple rustic tale. We're in Russia. A beautiful peasant girl unearths a stash of gold in a graveyard and outrages her parents by keeping its location secret while kitting

*Turning Alzheimer's into theatre is
like building a surfboard out
of sawdust*

herself out in silk dresses to bag an eligible stud. A film would explain that set-up in half a dozen images. Here it takes half an hour. The action finally gets started when an oily matchmaker arrives followed by his fellow villagers all claiming a slice of the loot. The story develops into a tale of good luck turning nasty. There are some exquisite touches. The floorboards of the peasant's kitchen are prised loose and raised upwards into the vertical slabs of a Jewish cemetery. Three little boys recite charming speeches among the gravestones. In the final tableau young men in white shirts and prayer shawls recite solemn chants by candlelight.

But the show is a disappointment because, oddly enough, it's not sufficiently Jewish. The elements of Semitic drama, especially New York Semitic drama, are familiar to all of us, and I was expecting the full menu of kosher treats in protean form. All were missing. There was no wise-cracking hypochondriac, no angry patriarch with a heart of gold, no closet atheist secretly engaged to a blonde shiksa, no chicken soup. Pinski's stagecraft lacks subtlety or guile. And the acting doesn't help. The overloud thespians bash out their lines at high volume like a novelty act of Scottie dogs barking 'Auld Lang Syne'. The Finborough's commitment to literary archaeology is a vital asset to the theatre. Alas, not every dig yields a classic.

Cinema

Shaken, not stirred

Deborah Ross

Spectre

12A, Nationwide

Spectre is the 24th film in the Bond franchise, the fourth starring Daniel Craig, the second directed by Sam Mendes, and the first at not much of anything. Nothing new to report, in other words. It probably delivers what the die-hard fans want, but it is not like *Casino Royale* or *Skyfall* (no one talks about *Quantum of Solace*, by the way, because it's assumed everyone involved was drunk) as it doesn't deliver to those of us who never liked Bond, but then discovered that we did. Where has Bond's interior landscape gone? Where is his woundedness? Where is the emotional heft? Who might we actually care about here?

At least we open quietly, with Bond lying back in a meadow, simply watching the clouds float by... I'm kidding, of course. We open with an action sequence set in Mexico City during the Day of the Dead. It's a set piece that sees our hero blow up a building and loop-the-loop in a helicopter, and it's filmed by Mendes as a continuous five-minute tracking shot, which other reviewers have gone wild for, but I'm kind of over prolonged tracking shots. (*The Player* famously opens with an eight-minute tracking shot; *Birdman* is a single 100-minute tracking shot.) And then it's to London, to discover that Judi Dench's M has left a message from beyond the grave and it's not 'please look after my cat' even though that's a film I'd like to see. I'd like to see Bond looking after M's cat, or performing everyday tasks generally, such as picking up his dry-cleaning or finally getting through to British Gas. 'The name's Bond. James Bond. I do not know my mother's maiden name as she died when I was very little. How about the first school I attended?'

M's message, in fact, puts him on the trail of a nasty outfit called Spectre. But is he going to be allowed to go after them? There is a new M (a peevish Ralph Fiennes, who is terrible at running, not deliberately), and a C (Andrew Scott), who is above M. C has decided that drones can do 007's job. '007 is prehistoric,' says C, and he does have a point. By my reckoning, Bond is now 98, or thereabouts, and deserves some downtime to look after a cat, had there been a cat to look after. But Bond won't be grounded, and goes rogue to Rome and Tangier and Austria, chasing Spectre, which is intent on hijacking the world's surveillance services, and whose members identify themselves to each other by wearing a ring engraved with an octopus. Personally, if I were part of a sinister, secret organisation intent on

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SPECTRE
007

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Sultry and dull: Daniel Craig as James Bond

hijacking the world's surveillance services, I would not wear a highly visible ring engraved with an octopus, but you do have to bring a sense of fun to these films, or it would be unbearable. You'd never stop. How come Bond always finds a parking place right outside any place he's visiting? (In Rome! Have you ever tried to park in Rome?) How come big buildings in densely populated cities are blown up but there are never any civilian casualties? There's no point to this, and it's not in keeping with the spirit to keep harping on, but it's hard. British intelligence HQ? Wouldn't they have built that with shatterproof glass?

Bond, of course, tracks down the most evil of the villains to his lair, who, in this instance, is Christoph Waltz. He is hiding out in a meteor crater and wants to drill into Bond's brain, for no good reason whatsoever. The more interesting character by far is Monica Bellucci, a widow whom Bond seduces, but so urgently that she's only on screen for three minutes, tops. Still, there was genuine chemistry there, and wouldn't it have been fascinating to see Bond hook-

ing up with a woman more his own age, for once? Who was at least 51, to his 98?

But no, instead, he falls for Madeleine Swann (Léa Seydoux), who is a doctor, so it's not like her only purpose is to look lovely in a silky nightie although, that said, she does look lovely in a silky nightie, while doing no doctoring at all. And, there is no chemistry between Bond and Swann. Not a hint, not a squeak, not a whisper. I would also add that while Q (Ben Whishaw) has been upgraded to an expanded role, Moneypenny (Naomie Harris) has been downgraded to what is effectively a cameo.

This offers everything the die-hard fans want, as all the formula is here: the chases, the exotic locales, the cars, the babes, and so on. But for those, such as myself, who only came on board from *Casino* on, it's a lost cause, without any decent back stories, and without Craig putting in his brilliant wounded pathos performance. Instead he is merely sultry, and dull, and there's no proper jeopardy either. We know Bond is safe, and there are no characters to invest in otherwise.

I wept when Eva Green died in *Casino*, and I wept when Dench died in *Skyfall*, but I wept only with frustration here. This film does what it does and probably does it well (she says, grudgingly), but we have seen it all before.

Television DVF worship James Delingpole

Girl is back for half-term so I've been able to watch nothing but crap on TV this week. Some of you will say, 'Oh come on! You pay the bills, so you get to control the remote.' But that's not how things work when you've got a teenage girl at home. Especially not one whose ankle you have been responsible for breaking. So crap, I'm afraid, is what I'm going to have to review.

Not, it must be said, that the crap has all been crap. *House of DVF* (E! Online), for example. I've mentioned it before and the reason I'm mentioning it again is the matchless insights it offers into the strange and terrifying world of womankind. It's like an uber-chic version of *The Apprentice* where, instead of having Lord Sugar pump £250,000 into your no-hope start-up project, the prize is to become 'brand ambassador' to the magnificent Belgian-born, New York-based fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg.

Perdition catch my soul but I do worship DVF. I love her designs, I love her manner — a beguiling mix of imperious-

*I'll humbly accept reincarnation as
Diane von Furstenberg's footstool*

ness, coquettishness and bruised wisdom — and I love the way she is always totally right about everything. In another life, I'm going to go back in time and marry her before that upstart German prince does. Or, should she be unwilling — as I'm sure she will be — I'll humbly accept reincarnation as her footstool.

Yes, *The Apprentice* (BBC1, Wednesday) still has its moments, especially now the bullet-headed hell creature (or so he pretends; deep down, I suspect, he's a pussycat) Claude Littner has been drafted into replace Nick Hewer and spit bile on all the vile candidates. But Littner, entertaining though he is, has nothing on DVF's even scarier familiar, the red-haired, green-eyed, impossibly beautiful Jessica Joffe, daughter of a German film director, with a cut-glass accent and withering hauteur born of her education at an English girls' private school and the ruthlessness of a king cobra.

I worship Jessica too, by the way. And she does have a softer side. One of the candidates is a sweet blonde Californian called Ally from the Valley who has lots going

for her — looks, charm and enthusiasm — but threatens to be crippled by what Simon Schama would probably call her ‘suburban’ tastes. So, like an Olympian deity briefly taking human form, Joffe deigned to visit Ally in her squalid hotel room (‘Good God, is that a vibrator on her bed?’ ‘Dad. You idiot! It’s a hair brush.’) and kindly helped her jet-tison half her wardrobe.

With *The Apprentice*, now on its 11th series, you feel it’s all a bit random: anyone could win, they’re all a bit annoying and rubbish, and it’s really just formulaic, reality TV contrivance. *House of DVF* on the other hand is the real deal. Taking its cue from DVF herself, it has an aesthetic and a purpose. DVF’s mother survived Auschwitz; Diane herself has gone from Seventies style icon to near-bankrupt to global brand; so you don’t just get tears and glam and bitchery, you get a weekly lesson in how to live your life. Be absolutely committed; surround yourself with talent; style is everything; and let’s have none of that whiny self-pity: just concentrate on being more feminine and enjoy being a woman. Useful lessons for any teenage girl, I think.

My big surprise of the week is how remarkably watchable *X Factor* (ITV, Saturday) has become. Girl tells me that, in

My big surprise of the week is how remarkably watchable X Factor has become

response to falling ratings and the more professional performers on *The Voice*, it has been forced to up its game, partly by wasting less time auditioning comedy no-hopers, partly by ramping up the cruelty with the six-seat challenge.

There are six seats on the stage and if the judges like you, you get to sit in one of them. But that doesn’t guarantee your place in the next round. If a better performer comes along, someone has to go. And that’s when the fun starts. The panel members crane to look at the baying audience who, like their antecedents in the Colosseum, have very strong views about which total loser deserves to die horribly. Instead of giving a thumbs-up or thumbs-down, they use their fingers to gesture the seat number of the person who must go.

It gets crueller still. Sometimes, a judge will choose to eject a contestant deemed by the audience to be a stayer. At which point the mob will jeer and snarl and shriek — angry grannies, snarling teenies — until the presiding judge, if he or she has any sense, will recall the contestant and sacrifice someone else in their stead. While all this is going on, the contestants on the chairs sit transfixed and unnerved by the blood-crazed yells, counting the number of fingers being held up and whimpering — they’re mic-ed up, of course, so you can hear them — ‘Ulp! It’s me next...’

Then Boy came back from school and that was nice too. I pretended to be a proper dad like other boys have. We watched the rugby.

Radio Battle fatigue Kate Chisholm

Can anyone explain this sudden enthusiasm for Agincourt, that unexpected victory over the French, now being celebrated, or rather commemorated, on radio, on digital, online? It was so weird to switch on Radio 4 on Sunday morning (which just happened to be St Crispin’s Day, the day on which the battle was fought) to discover that even *Sunday Worship* was being devoted to commemorating one of the bloodiest battles in that most bloodthirsty period. The service, old-fashioned Matins, came from the Chapel Royal at St James’s, and apparently the priests, choristers and vestrymen from that chapel were singing on the battlefield alongside Henry V in October 1415, when the English bowmen, just 6,000 to 9,000 of them, took on their French adversaries and beat them into the mud — in spite of being outnumbered by up to five to one. As the solemn voice of the sub-dean intoned prayers and supplications for his predecessors at the Chapel Royal, it was hard not to giggle at the pomposity and inherent madness of it all.

Quite apart from the fact that it happened an awfully long time ago, we were told that Agincourt was ‘one of the great moments in our nation’s story’, which would not have made much sense in a history lesson. The battle was bloody; it was brutal. There would have been no mercy shown on either side. Thousands of men and boys died in the most gruesome ways imaginable, in hand-to-hand combat on a slippery, boggy, body-filled battlefield. It was neither necessary, nor great

(in spite of Shakespeare’s great play, lines from which — ‘we few, we happy few, we band of brothers’ — were quoted as part of the sermon). Agincourt may have been a valiant victory for the English, but we were not defending our territory, but were rather fighting to keep hold of land that we had no right to govern. What sense does it make to say prayers for the peace of the world in a service dedicated to jingoistic warmongering?

The previous evening, on *Archive on 4*, the BBC, and Radio 4 in particular, had been compared to an institution as revered but also as monolithic and sclerotic as the established Church in a programme presented by Steve Hewlett. He took us through a brief history of the corporation, from nerdy technological company in the mid-1920s to a national institution, reminding us just how quickly that change happened. In just ten years. By 3 September 1939, radio (and the BBC) was at the heart of national life, so that when Chamberlain announced that Britain was at war, millions of people heard the news at the same time, as it was being made, for the first time ever. Hewlett’s programme was part of the campaign by the BBC to safeguard the licence fee in the next round of negotiations due next year when its Charter comes up for renewal (on Tuesday *The Media Show* debated how the BBC should be funded). The same old arguments about subscription, subsidy, sponsorship or a commercial free-for-all were aired. Best line of all, though, came from the inimitable Terry Wogan: ‘I don’t fancy coming on here with a toilet roll in one hand and a loaf of Mother’s Pride in the other.’

As if to prove that the Reithian mission still has a heartbeat, if a lot weaker than it used to be, Radio 2 has this week been dedicated to ‘Faith in the World’, its annual check-up on the state of the nation’s religious beliefs, looking in particular this year at what it’s like to grow up in multi-faith Britain. On *Good Morning Sunday* (with Olly Smith), we heard from Anjum Anwar, a Muslim who since 2007 has been employed by Blackburn Cathedral to further Christian and Muslim relations. She is often asked what a woman wearing a headscarf is doing in a cathedral, to which she replies that the way to bring people together is through conversation.

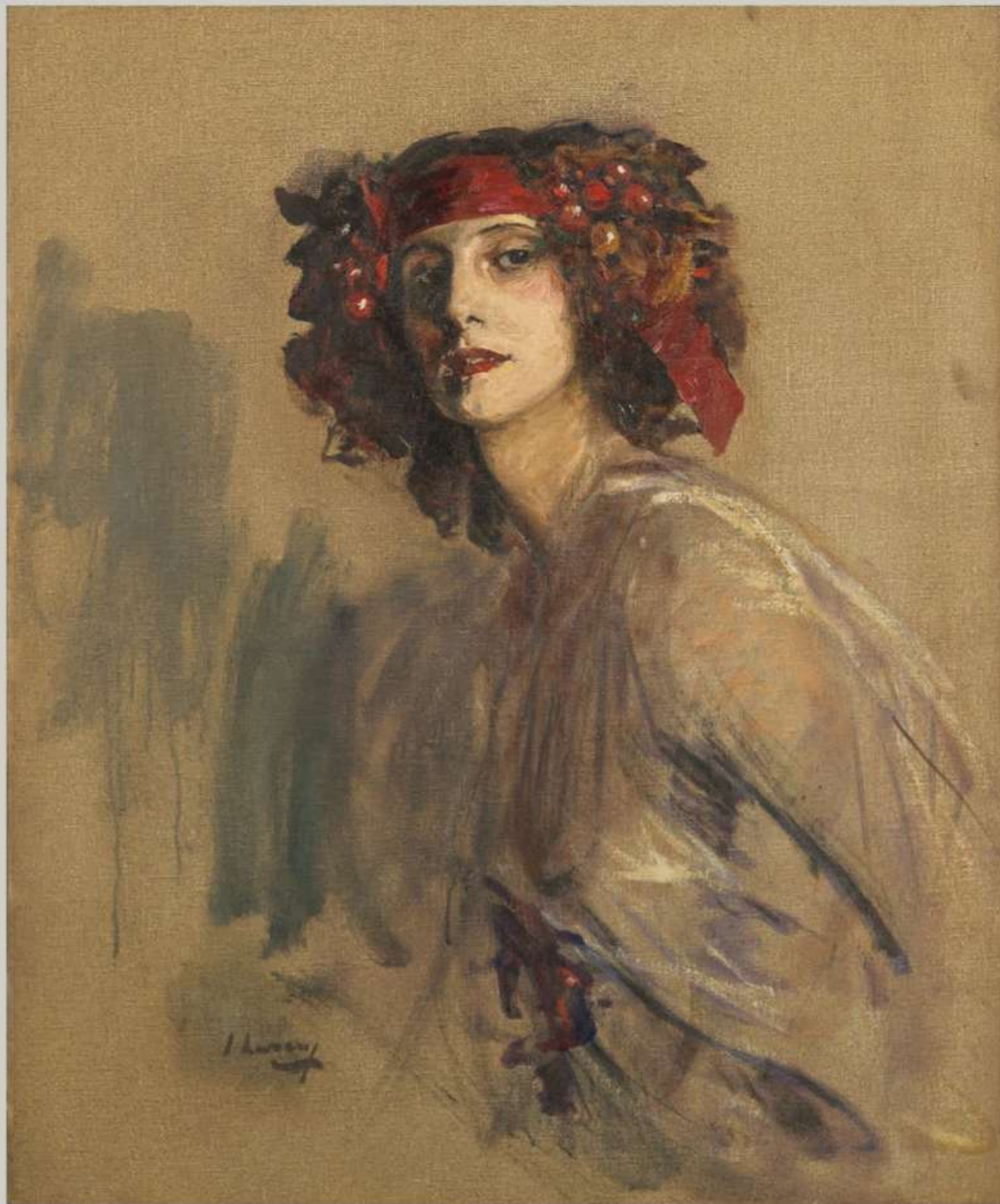
‘If you ask me if I’m British, what does that mean?’ she said. ‘Does it mean queuing? Does it mean you support Man United? Does it mean you eat fish and chips? Why do I need to state that I’m British. I’ve never been anything else.’ She believes that people are now being made to choose between certain identities. The enthusiasm for Agincourt is just part of this change in the way we think about ourselves. As Anwar reminded us, persuasively, ‘This is a fantastic place for people of different faiths and attitudes to live together but retain their own religious identity. And I think we need to build on that.’



‘And this is a picture of my sweetheart by Frank Auerbach.’

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Sir John Lavery RA RSA RHA 1856–1941

Anna Pavlova, The Great Russian Dancer, 1883

Oil on canvas · signed lower left, J Lavery

30 × 25 in · 76.2 × 63.5 cm

Anna Pavlova began a highly anticipated season at the Palace Theatre, London, in 1911. Lavery was commissioned by The Illustrated London News to paint her portrait for a colour supplement. She posed in the Bacchante costume which she wore to dance the Autumn Bacchanal from Pepita's 'The Seasons'.

The Lake District

By Claudia Massie

Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling is the best thing in the Lake District. I lived near Wigton, just north of the fells, for two years and escaping the shadow of the clingfilm factory to witness generations of champions, all called Brocklebank, do writhy battle on the Cumbrian turf was a delight. Fools might think that the embroidered pants worn by competitors over their white suits indicate a camp, silly sport, but they are wrong. It is a noble art and its practitioners are heroes; legends of the Lakes. The terminology is as thrilling as the bouts: swinging hype, hank, cross buttock, inside click. (The latter is a particularly devilish move.)

While some would say — correctly — that no visit to the Lakes is complete without witnessing wrestling, it remains a sorry fact that most of the 16 million visitors each year will confine themselves to walking, or looking at daffodils. Sixteen million! Little wonder that the Lake District towns are always bustling, that businesses appear to thrive, and that every building seems to be a holiday home.

There is nothing new in this. The Lake District has been entertaining tourists since at least the 1770s. The landscape, with its dramatic rock and wide water, has always been seductive. To the east of the M6 lies another expanse of empty land as Cumbria clambers up the Pennines to become Northumberland



The romanticism of fell and water

— but few travellers turn that way. They are drawn to the Lakes, in search of the sublime. The tourist infrastructure helps attract them, but it is the romanticism of fell and water that ensnares the imagination.

There is nothing like the Lake District in the rest of England. The wilds of the Pennines are foreboding and austere, while the Peak District is too small in scale to astound. If you live in Scotland you might feel no need to travel to Cumbria, unless you lack for outdoor gear shops, but in England the Lake District is the one place where nature seems truly awesome. Turner came here, Constable and Girtin and Cozens too; Wordsworth, of

course, and Thomas de Quincey, who wrote of the ‘dinner parties and the gaiety of soirées dansantes’ of Lakeland life among the cultured and privileged of Georgian society.

Artists, poets and walkers alike continue to find that the landscape here provokes the specific ‘way of feeling’ that Baudelaire considered crucial in romanticism. It is there in the way the trees and rocks frame views down majestic valleys, and in the play of light on distant crests. It is there in the squat stone buildings that seem to have tumbled from the rock faces and assembled themselves deep in the turf. And it is there in the swinging hype, the hank and the inside click.

Education



Flemish, Cognoscenti, about 1620. © The National Gallery London

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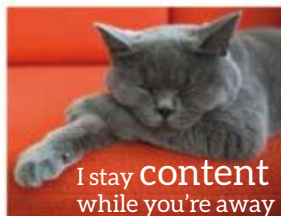
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'Hipster culture is, it seems, a celebration of a cracked — and peculiarly infantile — kind of nostalgia'
— Tanya Gold, p70

LIFE

High life

Taki



To Cleveland, Ohio, where middle America's middle class begins its great Midwest sprawl. I've always wanted to visit Cleveland because the so-called sophisticates poke fun at it. And the place did not disappoint. Beautiful municipal buildings of fascist Roman style line the shores of Lake Erie — public libraries, city halls, opera house, large public spaces, you get my drift. The people are friendly, unlike the aggressive slobs that pass for Noo Yawkers nowadays. The purpose of the visit was to moderate a debate, visit *Chronicles* magazine staff and rub elbows with *Chronicles* readers, who showed up in force. Among the numerous speakers was the great Pat Buchanan, three-time presidential candidate and a true blue conservative writer who has kept the faith throughout.

His speech, delivered in a mild tone with no theatrics, left me depressed. The de-Christianisation of America has taken place without any protest by the people. Churches are closing and priests are mostly senior citizens. What is worse, if that's possible, is the plot to do away with the American past. Columbus Day is now called Indigenous Peoples' Day, and there's a move to take Andrew Jackson off the \$20 bill because he owned slaves.

Washington, Jefferson and Madison were also slave-owners — out of the first five American presidents only the two Adamases did not own slaves — and they will be next. The one that makes me laugh is the Cinco de Mayo celebration, about which I don't have a clue. What I do know, however, is that on 17 September 1862, the bloodiest battle in American history took place in Antietam, and that's the day on which we should be celebrating the heroic dead on both sides. What the hell is Cinco de Mayo anyway? A dance step, a rumba band?

It is very simple. The counterculture has won the war. Ninety-seven per cent of Americans spoke English at home during the 1950s. At present more than 50 per cent

in Los Angeles speak a language other than English at home. During Eisenhower's years, 87 per cent of Americans were of European descent. That number is down to 63 per cent and falling rapidly. What is there to say or do? Not much, because political correctness has put paid to protest. The migration policies of Angela Merkel and the gangsters in Brussels are one of the great crimes of any century, yet those who protest this great crime are called racists.

Sixty per cent of white Americans vote Republican. Ninety per cent of black and 70 per cent of Latino Americans vote Democrat. The electoral vote is shrinking for whites and once the country looks like Cal-

Once the country looks like California it will be impossible to elect a Republican

ifornia, where whites are in the minority, it will be impossible to elect a Republican. The great silent majority, as Richard Nixon called it, is no more. Europe is undergoing a similar fate, the difference being I always thought Americans knew better.

When I was at Virginia, I proudly flew the Confederate flag in my fraternity bedroom — crossed with the Greek one. Today I'd be singled out by some horror-haired TV reporter as a bigot and most likely be accused of rape by some female journalist eager to make the cover of a magazine. Which brings me to the stealth campaign to empty the prisons of black criminals. There is a delegitimisation of law enforcement by political activists and media types that is selling the myth of a bias on the part of the courts against blacks. It began with the anti-police movement after the killing of a black man in Ferguson, Missouri, who had moved towards a white police officer and who had minutes before robbed a nearby store.

A phoney like Newt Gingrich has joined

the campaign that sells the myth of casual drug offenders filling up prison cells. They make up less than 1 per cent of federal inmates, and the rates are falling. Black activists have decided that strong law enforcement should be done away with, and there is a hate campaign against cops. Needless to say, the demonisation of the police and the criminal justice system will end very, very badly. In New York City, year in year out, about 90 per cent of homicide victims are non-white males, as are 90 per cent of their killers, yet criminally irresponsible black and Latino leaders are complaining about police officers doing their duty.

Writers and journalists keep recalling the turbulent New York of the 1970s, when budget cuts and crime and unemployment had brutalised the city. I lived through those days and the place was more fun than it is now. The cops wore their hair long and had droopy moustaches. The place was gritty and magnificent. It was like living in a war zone. One had allies — the cops and others like oneself, law-abiding souls. No one, but no one, took the side of the bad guys. Al Sharpton was in the future, as were all the 'community activists' that have sprung up. Media types did not dare take the side of the bad guys. They now climb the ladder of success by doing just that. Give me the Seventies any time. Down with Disneyland New York.

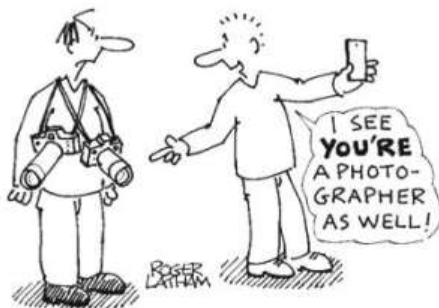
Low life

Jeremy Clarke



The fag end of October. Dark evenings. My smelly old Barbour. Chopping and splitting wood. Uncanny stillnesses. Psychedelic maple trees. The thin winter piping of robins. Sodden leaves clinging to the soles of my boots. And Liberty Caps dotting the pastures.

Our Liberty Cap is an insignificant-looking thing. A bent, spindly stalk supports a tiny parasol tapering to the distinctive nipple. The parasol is rusty brown when wet, drying in the sunshine to a pale yellow. They grow singly or in small groups. The





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psychoactive agents are psilocin and psilocybin. (Therapists in the United States lawfully give cancer patients psilocybin to take them out of themselves and cheer them up. The intensely mystical experience reported by three quarters of them apparently drives a coach and horses through their narrow egotistical perspectives, resulting in lasting cheerfulness.) British Liberty Caps are among the most potent hallucinogenic mushrooms in the world; the psychoactive constituents account for anything up to 2 per cent of their dried weight. Generally speaking, a dozen of these magic mushrooms eaten straight from the ground might be enough to send you on your way for four to five hours. Double that and you'll be in the fast lane. Our nit-picking law says we may

I dumped a tangle of magic mushrooms in my sandwich when we got back to the car

pick and eat them in their natural state, but if we 'prepare' them in any fashion — dry them, for example, or make a pot of tea with them — we will be subject to the stiff penalties associated with the Class As.

The first time I ate magic mushrooms was one autumn in my early twenties. I was picking potatoes with a gang of itinerant labourers in a muddy field in Oxfordshire, and I got chatting to the fellow in the next furrow. He was about twice my age and he had a Zapata moustache and a humorous, outdoor face. He was going to huck spuds in the morning and in the afternoon he was going to pick magic mushrooms: why didn't I come along? So at lunch break, instead of sitting down to eat our sandwiches, he and I got into his shed of a car and he drove us a few miles to a quiet wood. We parked and I followed him through the wood until we came to a small cow pasture closely bounded by tall trees.

It was a peaceful spot. The pasture was lush: about three to four inches high. My colleague explained that he'd picked magic mushrooms here for several years and he described the appearance of a *Psilocybe semilanceata* as best he could. We dropped to our knees and began combing the grass with our fingers. It took a while before he found our first. He showed one on the open palm of his calloused, mud-caked hand, drawing my attention to the unmistakable crowning nipple. Then he popped it into his mouth and we returned to the search.

Eventually, I found a similar one, showed it to him, got the nod, and ate it. Unsurprisingly it tasted only of raw mushroom. After another absorbing half an hour, I'd found and eaten perhaps six or seven. I asked him how many he had found. On his knees 20 feet away, he said he'd found about ten. I made the observation that the more I ate, the easier they were to find, and his laugh was complicit and sort of shamanistic. It

was true. After about my 20th, I had the impression that not only were they easier to find, but they were also signalling sentiently to me. Suddenly they looked glamorous and golden and even lordly, and it seemed incredible that they had been initially so hard to find.

I can't remember how many we each found and ate: perhaps 40 or 50. Loads, anyway. I remember dumping a tangle of them in one of my sandwiches when we got back to the car. And then we drove away, both of us speechless. But driving became too concrete a thing for him to deal with, and he soon had to stop. He drew off the road next to an old five-bar gate. On the far side of this old gate was a golf course, and not ten yards from where we sat was a tee. And for what seemed like the next few hours we sat and watched serious-faced golfers arrive at this tee, size up the offing, drive off, then exit, stage left. It wasn't funny; it was totally amazing. The golfers seemed to belong to some bizarre and alien species. My state of mind? I can't describe it. The dialogue between Alice and the Caterpillar is the best analogy I can think of; especially when the Caterpillar says, 'So you think you're changed, do you?' 'I'm afraid I am, sir,' said Alice. 'I can't remember things as I used — and I don't keep the same size for ten minutes together!'

Real life

Melissa Kite



'This is a two Voltarol day,' I thought, as I popped another pill and settled into the bath after Darcy's first hurdling session. Well, three Voltarol if you count the one I gave to the young jockey who parted company with his horse at the first hurdle just in front of me.

He knelt on the ground wearing a stoical expression as he cradled his arm. He has been doing this since he was 15. When he is older he will be able to tell his children, in all seriousness, that he went to the school of hard knocks and the college of crashing into hurdles.

'If there are bones sticking out,' I thought, because the jockey tea room talk about injuries nonchalantly suffered is always luridly laid on for my benefit every time I nip in for a cuppa, 'then that's it. I'm not doing this any more.' (My mother rings me up daily to

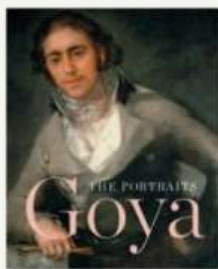
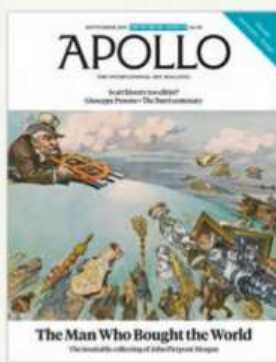
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announce, 'Listen here. You're not to do it. Do you hear me?')

But he hadn't broken his arm. 'It's just bruised,' said another jockey who rushed to help. This was a relief, although 'just bruised' is something they apply to pretty much everything in the life of a jockey. As a trainer once said to the 18-year-old Tony McCoy as two splintered bone ends pressed through his jodhpurs, 'Are you sure you've broken it?'

I had been hanging on to the reins a bit tighter than was strictly fair to Darcy as a group of four of us, the trainer in the lead, began the session by pirouetting towards a line of jumps in his practice field.

I say pirouette because that is the best way to describe how excited racehorses approach the start of a line of jumps. They don't so much canter towards them as spin towards them. But as soon as we got the horses pointed in the right direction it was all systems go. They were up for it.

'Nice steady canter' was how the trainer described what we were about to do, before we hurtled at the set of tyre obstacles. Oh, I have to point out, because the trainer wants me to: when I said before that I raced around his track at 40mph I was exaggerating.

If I had been doing 40mph he would have been genuinely excited. Racehorses only do 40mph when they are at the peak of their fitness and at top speed. I was probably doing a lot less than that on my youngster.

'Listen,' I told him. 'I don't got no speedometer. When I tell the readers I'm doing 40, it's because it feels that way.'

No doubt he will tell me when he reads this that I am exaggerating again now because I say we approached that line of jumps as though we were flying like the wind. I found it utterly thrilling. He will say I need to get out more.

Darcy leapt like a stag over the first two jumps. But in front of the third she put in what might be termed 'a dirty stop'. And a split second after she did that she lurched over it and completed her trajectory.

This pitched me almost over the top. I've only been riding in a racing saddle for a few weeks so give me some credit for jumping in one. I wobbled precariously before righting myself, hat down over my eyes like something out of *Dad's Army*.

I decided to do the next two larger jumps — which were real hurdles from a race track — at a stately pace to ensure my survival. But my plan came to nothing when, as we approached the slanted hurdles, the jockey in front of me deposited himself in the wings, taking assorted bits and bobs of the jump with him.

We had an interlude thereafter catching the loose horse and verifying the 'just bruised'-ness of the young lad's condition, after which the trainer insisted that the

three still on board would have another crack at the line of hurdles.

Off we flew at them with me clinging tightly to a keen as mustard Darcy, feeling a bit like an emotional cripple. I was poised up there with all the enthusiasm of a damp rag, yelping, 'Go on, girl! Please!' But Darcy performed like a pro and flew over.

In fact, she jumped so high I shot upwards by a few feet, shouted out an expletive mid-air, and then shot back down again, banging my backside.

Afterwards, I shared a strip of Voltarol in the tack room with the young jockey who was nursing his arm. Then I went home, ran a bath and popped another pill before bed, lest my lower back seize up completely, putting a premature stop to this glorious mid-life crisis.

Long life Alexander Chancellor



The Metropolitan Club in Washington is so close to the White House that President Obama chose to walk there for lunch on Tuesday through Lafayette Park while his motorcade followed behind. The lunch was described in the media as 'secret', and American reporters were frustrated by the refusal of the White House and the club's staff to divulge anything whatsoever about it. But nothing the President does is really secret, and his visit was certainly not secret to me, since I was staying in the club at the time under a reciprocal arrangement between the Metropolitan and the Garrick in London, of which I'm a member.

As I had been warned in advance, security men visited my bedroom with sniffer dogs to check it for explosives; and when I returned from a morning walk, airport-type security was in place at the front door. I had to empty my pockets and be patted up and down, though the man doing the patting showed good manners bordering on deference, which seemed in keeping with the club's pride in its 'tradition of social civility'. Alas, I didn't see Obama. I had a secret lunch of my own to attend. But when I returned from this, there in the front hall of the Metropolitan Club was George Mitchell, the architect of the Good Friday Agreement, who, it subsequently transpired, had been one of the two hosts at the lunch — the other being Tom Daschle, a fellow Democrat and, like Mitchell, a former Senate majority leader.

If I was a little excited about this near-encounter with the leader of the free world, the club took his visit in its stride. It says on its website that it's one of the city's 'most valued private institutions', one which, more than 150 years after its founding during the American Civil War, 'continues to attract distinguished members from around the world', and has been 'a destination for many local, national and international leaders, including nearly every US president since Abraham Lincoln'. So nothing new about Obama turning up there.

Clubs such as the Metropolitan in America were clearly modelled in the first place on the gentlemen's clubs of London, but they are generally grander and more opulent. They also seem if anything more traditional, except for the fact that nearly all of them now have women members whereas several London clubs still do not. It was the Garrick's refusal to admit women that caused the Century Club in New York to withdraw from the reciprocal arrangement by which

Security men visited my bedroom with sniffer dogs to check it for explosives

members of each could enjoy the hospitality of the other. Luckily, the Metropolitan hasn't followed suit.

During ten days in America, first in New York and then Washington, I have found that 'social civility' is not exclusive to the Metropolitan Club but more or less ubiquitous. I am impressed by what good manners most Americans have. This comes as a surprise, especially in New York with its tough reputation. But people are far politer in New York than they are in London. If you ask them the way, they will patiently tell you; and they will smile while they do it. When I couldn't access the subway with my Metrocard — the equivalent of the Oyster card — a woman simply used hers to let me through and refused a refund. And so it goes on all the time.

There are, of course, crazy people who bellow insults at the sky; there are importunate beggars; and there are doubtless many malevolent characters among the milling crowds. But New York is generally a comforting and reassuring place. It feels as safe as Chipping Norton.

What distinguishes it from everywhere else, however, is the scale and magnificence of its architecture. I went down to Ground Zero for the first time since seeing the devastation after 9/11 and was astonished by what had replaced it. It felt almost unreal, like a sort of fairyland. Condé Nast has now moved with all its magazines into the new and elegant skyscraper that has replaced the twin towers, and the views from the offices of the *New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair* across the harbour are simply breathtaking. I don't know how any work gets done there at all.

Robin Oakley

For many of us, though, perhaps the

A cartoon illustration of an angel with wings and a halo sitting at a desk with a laptop, asking a man standing in clouds to confirm his last address.

Janet de Botton

Chess

Doctor Hou

Raymond Keene

Hou Yifan has won what must be considered one of the strongest, if not the strongest, all-women chess tournaments ever held. Staged in the opulent surroundings of the Casino in Monte Carlo, the organisers succeeded in arranging a line-up which could have been improved upon only if Judit Polgar had agreed to participate. Judit, after many years at the top of female chess, has finally retired. Leading scores in Monaco were as follows: Hou Yifan 9/11; M. Muzychuk and Koneru 7; Cramling and Pogonina 6.

It was unfortunate that there was no British representation in this stellar competition. Indeed, ever since 1976 when the English women's team won the silver medals in the Haifa Olympiad, there seems to have been a steady decline in English women's chess. This is quite strange; it is worth noting that probably the best chess players in Parliament are the Labour MPs Rachel Reeves, Maria Eagle and Angela Eagle.

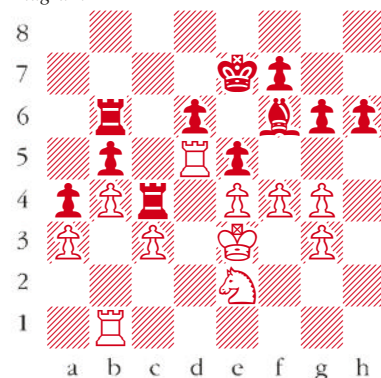
The English Chess Federation's failure to foster female talent is disappointing. Barry Martin recently wrote an article for the newspaper *Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster Today* about the disparity in support for men's and women's chess in England. Since then, the Federation has also suffered the debacle of having to cancel a planned English women's championship. At more or less the same time, several federation officials, deemed by their electorate to have been under-performing, lost out to 'any other candidate' at the recent federation AGM.

This week, we follow the female stars from Monaco in action.

Hou Yifan-Zhukova: Monaco 2015
(see diagram 1)

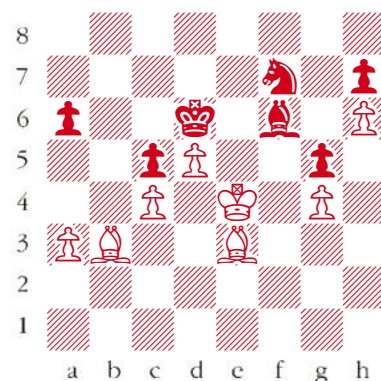
White stands better here as she can manoeuvre against the black b- and h-pawns. Black's next is an attempt to free her bishop and grab a pawn but it backfires. **44 ... exf4+ 45 gxf4 Bxc3 46 Kd3 Bf6 47 Rxb5** With this small tactic White creates an immensely powerful passed pawn on the b-file. **47 ... Rbc6** The best chance

Diagram 1



was 47 ... Rxb5 48 Kxc4 Rb8. The white pair of rooks is now much stronger than the black pair. **48 Ra5 Rc2 49 b5 Rc8 50 Ra7+ Ke6 51 b6 Ra2 52 f5+ Ke5 53 Ra5+ Black resigns**

M. Muzychuk-Stefanova: Monaco 2015



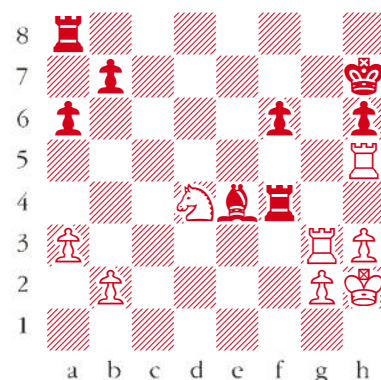
In this endgame White gives an object lesson in how the king can be a powerful piece in the endgame. **57 Bf2 Be5 58 Kf5 Bf4 59 Bd1 Nxb6+ 60 Kf6 Ng8+ 61 Kg7 Ne7 62 Kxh7 Nc8 63 Kg6 Nb6 64 Be2 Bc1** Black has some counter-chances as the white a- and c-pawns are weak. However, her bishop pair and active king prove too powerful. **65 Bg3+ Kd7 66 Bd3 a5 67 Be5 a4 68 Bf5+ Kd8 69 d6 Nd7 70 Bc3 Ke8 71 Bc2 Bxa3 72 Bxa4 Bc1 73 Bf6 Bf4 74 Be7 Black resigns**

PUZZLE NO. 385

White to play. This position is from Koneru-Zhukova, Monaco 2015. How did White quickly exploit the constricted position of the black king? Answers to me at The Spectator by Tuesday 3 November or via email to victoria@spectator.co.uk or by fax on 020 7681 3773. The winner will be the first correct answer out of a hat, and each week there is a prize of £20. Please include a postal address and allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Last week's solution 1 ... Nxb3+

Last week's winner Thomas Watson, Glasgow



Competition

Fictihew

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 2921 you were invited to write a cleriheh about a fictional character.

The cleriheh is a comic four-line (AABB) biographical poem characterised by metrical irregularity and awkward rhyme. The first line is often the subject's name. Or, to put it another way:

E.C. Bentley
Quite accidentally
Invented this form of wit,
And this is it. (Anon)

Here is another Bentley-inspired cleriheh, this one written by Michael Curl:

E.C. Bentley
Mused while he ought to have studied
intently;
It was this muse
That inspired clerihehs.

There was much to applaud in an entry full of wit and whimsy. Those printed below fought off stiff opposition to bag £8 per cleriheh.

Crow
didn't want it so.
Given another chance he wouldn't choose
to be muse to Ted Hughes.
D.A. Prince

Robinson Crusoe,
Wistfully regarding his unused trousseau,
Said, 'I'm approaching do-or-die day!
If I'm not rescued Thursday, I'll marry Friday.'
Roger Slater

Ishmael
Received phish mail
But he knew it was a trick
When they claimed they could lengthen his
Moby Dick.

Lot
Was not
Disappointed his wife looked back. He saw it as
an opportunity
For her to become a pillar of the community.
Robert Schechter

Carmen
Was charmen to barmen,
Handing out bags
Of free fags.
John Whitworth

Lancelot
Invited Guinevere to 'dirty dance' a lot.
His great mistake was to have her on the
Round Table,
Which then became quite unstable.
Brian Allgar

James Bond
Would never despond.
He knew there'd be more sex and glory
In the next story.
W.J. Webster

Caliban
Has no obvious connection to the Taleban,
But it would be a crime
Not to use the rhyme.
Rob Stuart

Oliver Mellors
Was one of those working-class fellers
Who had it off
With a toff.
Nicholas Hodgson

Mr Fitzwilliam Darcy
Was upper-classy —
Indeed, upper-upper-upper;
But until the plot thickened not at all
Elizabeth's cuppa.
Ray Kelley

Castaway Robinson Crusoe
Was hopeless at housework and knew so;
But then along came Man Friday
To keep their island tidy.
Mike Morrison

Lady Macbeth
Was the cause of death
Of lots and lots
Of Scots.
David Silverman

Humbert Humbert
Married the girl's mum, but
Found Lolita
Much sweeter.
A.R. Duncan-Jones

Simon Templar
Was sometimes an exemplar
Of what a saint
Ain't.
George Simmers

Cyrano
Thought he'd hear a 'no'
From Roxanne, showing a man can be brilliant
in some matters, and in some,
Dumb.
Barbara Kirby

Godot
Doesn't show.
There may be details of the play that I've missed,
But that's the gist.
Max Gutmann

Harry Flashman
Sneers, 'It would be a rash man
Indeed
Who would bet against the success of my
unprincipled breed.'
Chris O'Carroll

Some carp
At the morals of Becky Sharp,
While others consider Amelia Sedley
Deadly.
Carolyn Beckingham

NO. 2924: BAD SEX AWARD

You are invited to submit a 'love scene' from a novel that dampens rather than boosts the reader's libido. Please email entries of up to 150 words to lucy@spectator.co.uk by mid-day on 11 November.

Crossword

2235: Vile stuff

by *Dumpynose*

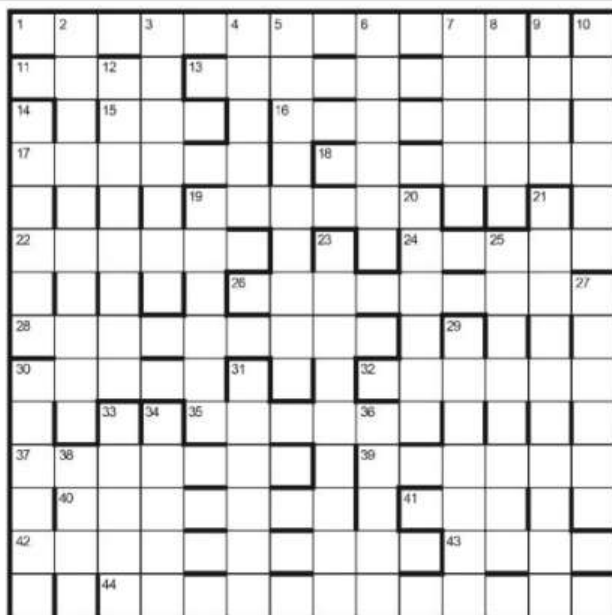
1/44 (eight words in total) is part of a question (in ODQ) minus a word exemplified by the other unclued lights (one hyphenated). The title suggests a further example (eight letters) which will appear diagonally in the grid and must be shaded.

Across

- 11 Very good not quite excellent dish (4)
- 13 Awful prig with patent for round engine part (10, hyphenated)
- 15 Gorilla regularly painting (3)
- 16 Bill's mate collecting resin (7)
- 17 Sons prod skinflint (6)
- 19 British clown's problem part of skull (6)
- 24 Don from near Grimsby is out jogging (5, two words)
- 26 Country seat with plonk where footballers play (9, two words)
- 28 Maximum surfer can see from rocky Consul Reef (duckless) (9)
- 30 Bottle inventor not big in Germany (5)
- 32 Score goal and make an impression (6, two words)
- 35 Some French fellow that eats flies? (6)
- 37 Artist and I painted English frogs (7)
- 39 Short notes about new fabrics (6)
- 40 Stroll by river trailing German punter (7)
- 41 Posh General Secretary feels loathing (3)
- 42 Toothless types in small radio broadcast (10)
- 43 Twin enthralled by thesaurus (4)

Down

- 3 Flapping auks hid brigands (7)



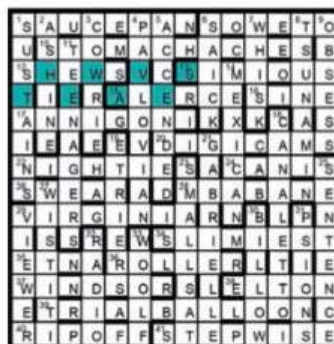
- 4 Old cannon – take aim first (5)
- 5 Dutch cooker possibly tops for fruiterer ... (9, hyphenated)
- 6 ... caught in huge headgear (6)
- 7 Coloured stones and rocks (5)
- 8 Cry for attention anarchist let out (5)
- 9 Open heart of setter perhaps (4)
- 10 Drink? Mine's not at all good (6)
- 12 Procedure no longer routine on circuit (8)
- 14 Crosses or gongs adorning man in Washington? (6)
- 19 Dope asked for round engine part (6, two words)
- 20 Aggressive female parrot (6)
- 21 Mainframes baffled TV hero (10, two words)
- 23 Sheepdog livid with blackbird (9, two words)
- 25 Aristo I've seen in pubs (8)
- 31 Mac's freckled ear (6)
- 33 As a friend I mop up (5, two words)
- 34 Half of Brits like beans (5)
- 36 Chilly afternoon upset Charlie (5)
- 38 No ordinary assembly in Asian city (4)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 16 November. There are two runners-up prizes of £20. (UK solvers can choose to receive the latest edition of the Chambers Dictionary instead of cash – ring the word 'Dictionary'.) Entries to: Crossword 2235, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name

Address

Email



SOLUTION TO 2232: UPS AND DOWNS

The thematic phrase is 'The Waves', shown in a wave pattern in the grid. It is the title of a novel by Virginia Woolf; 8, 30 and 36 are types of ocean waves; 14, 16 and 32 are other types of waves.

First prize Bob Wightman, Harpenden, Herts
Runners-up Tony Dew, London SW13; Frank Upton, Solihull, West Midlands

Status Anxiety

Club class won't fly any more

Toby Young

I'm getting a lot of abuse on Twitter for saying that having been a member of the Bullingdon is more of a hindrance than a help in contemporary Britain. My comment was a response to a piece by Charlotte Proudman in the *Guardian* on Monday that Oxford and Cambridge's drinking clubs 'cement the succession of power and influence in Britain among a narrow elite'.

In response to my claim, numerous people have pointed out that the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Mayor of London were all members of the Bullingdon. The problem with this rebuttal is that merely pointing out that Cameron, Osborne and Johnson are successful politicians doesn't, by itself, prove their membership wasn't a hindrance. It could be that all the other advantages they enjoyed — high IQ, good education, devoted parents, bags of drive and ambition, etc. — combined to overcome the disadvantage of being associated with Oxford's most notorious student society.

Why do I think it was a handicap? Well, for starters, every time one of those Gillman and Soame photographs showing them posing in their tailcoats is reproduced, it makes them look posh and out of touch. The photographs are rarely reprinted without a reference being made to members of the club getting drunk



Every time one of those Bullingdon photographs in tailcoats is reproduced it makes them look posh and out of touch

and smashing up restaurants — not a good look in contemporary politics. And the fact that the club was male-only instantly antagonises a decent percentage of half the population, not just radical feminists like Proudman.

But it isn't just me who thinks the Bullingdon is a curse. Do those who believe it has helped Cameron and Osborne think the reason Ed Miliband kept harping on about it at PMQs was to *boost* their electoral prospects? Indeed, the very same people who are attacking me on Twitter for saying their association with an elite Oxford dining society is harmful to their reputations don't hesitate to remind people of it at every opportunity.

OK, Proudman might say. Perhaps the optics of being a member of the Bullingdon isn't good for your image if you're a frontline politician. But that handicap is more than offset by the whopping great leg-up you get from having been anointed as a future member of the ruling class at Oxford. According to this view, Oxford and Cambridge's all-male drinking clubs operate as a kind of careers advice service for well-connected public schoolboys, putting them in touch with old members who can help them gain entry to elite professions like banking, politics and the law. That was certainly the impression given by *The Riot Club*, Laura Wade's well-received play (and film) about the Bullingdon.

The problem with this view is that not every member of the club — or indeed Oxbridge drinking societies in general — has been catapulted to the top. There have been several 'Where are they now?' features about the other eight people in the Bulling-

don photograph featuring Cameron and Johnson, and none of them have exactly set the world on fire. If the Bullingdon is an elite careers service, it isn't doing a great job.

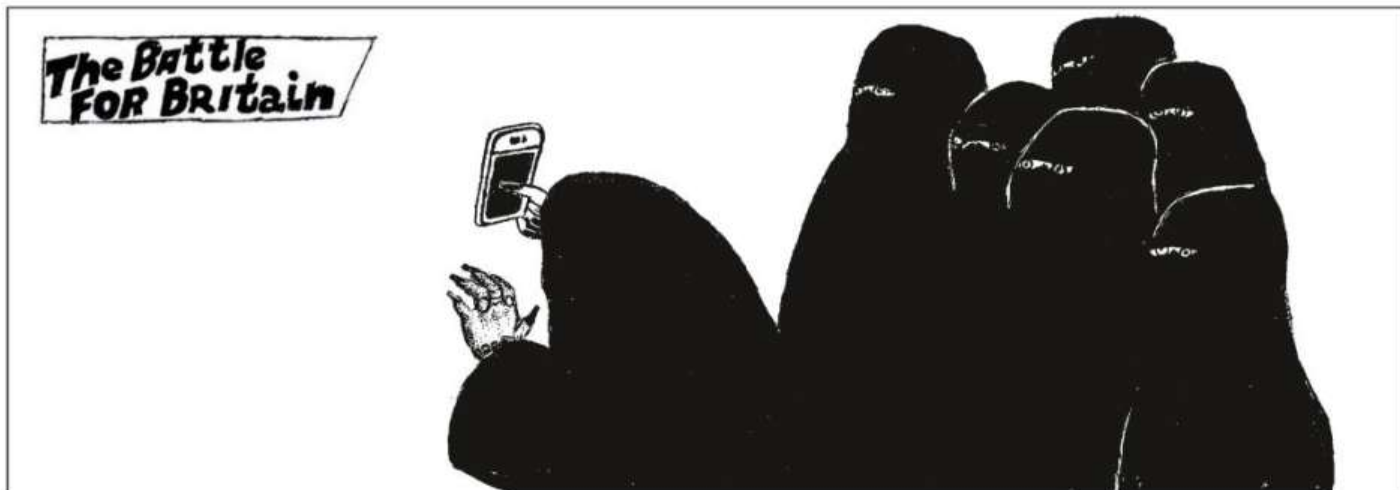
More importantly, this theory of how the ruling class renews itself is out of date — as out of date, in its own way, as the Bullingdon. It assumes that rapid advancement in Britain's elite professions is simply a matter of buying your way into the right networks — or having your parents buy your way in — and neglects the extent to which those networks and professions have embraced meritocracy.

Believe it or not, you have to take a test to be admitted into an elite public school like Eton or St Paul's and — incredible but true — you don't just automatically get a place at Oxford or Cambridge if you've been to one. The same goes for entry into professions like medicine and accountancy, all of which surround themselves with hurdles that successful entrants have to overcome. In the case of frontline politics, you have to pass an additional test, too — you have to get elected.

I'm not arguing that Britain has become wholly meritocratic and that everyone at the top deserves to be there on merit alone. But unless you acknowledge that the establishment has become at least partially meritocratic in order to preserve its legitimacy, you won't begin to understand how contemporary Britain works. Charlotte Proudman's hypothesis would have been true at almost any time in Oxford's 919-year history, but not in the past 50.

Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.

MICHAEL HEATH



Spectator Sport

Joubert's the man to sort out Syria

Roger Alton

Not since Walter Palmer, a cuddly Minnesota dentist, put down his drill and vanished off the face of the earth having made sure that Cecil the Lion took a crossbow bolt for the team, has there been a disappearance quite like it. I refer of course to Craig Joubert, the hapless Durban-born referee last seen leaving scorch marks in the Twickenham turf as he sprinted for safety after mistakenly (as it turns out) awarding the Australians a penalty in the last minute of the Rugby World Cup quarter-final against Scotland.

Now Joubert has been chucked under the bus by World Rugby, the governing body, who agree that he shouldn't have given the penalty. But poor guy: who hasn't made a mistake? Just ask Franz Beckenbauer. Anyway, spare a thought for Craig, a man who spent his teenage years volunteering to referee and who was only doing his best. He's actually a damn good referee. You assume he legged it to the nearest departure lounge and is probably even now roaming the veldt on a hiking holiday. Keeping an eye



He did a service to world peace, being the first person alive or dead to make the English feel sorry for the Scots

out for anyone wearing a kilt and holding a crossbow.

Personally, I think he did a service to world peace, being the first person alive or dead to make the English feel sorry for the Scots. Quite an achievement. Like that master of snoot Martin Amis making you vaguely warm to Jeremy Corbyn because he didn't get very good A-levels. Anyway, think what Joubert could do on assignment to Jerusalem, say, or Raqqa. A trip to Oslo can't be far off.

It's a good job he did give that penalty. Had he not I'd have fancied those brave and brilliant Scots to beat the Argies and reach the final. Which would have meant blasted 'Flower of Scotland', a modern and violently anti-English folk song, cascading down the Wimbledon stands for hours. Too much to bear.

Rugby is full of bish-bash, but everyone gets on in the end. Not so all sports. Some compelling film from the drivers' room after last weekend's US Grand Prix in Austin shows Lewis Hamilton calm himself before picking up the second-place cap and flinging it to Nico Rosberg. You're not sure whether it's 'banter' or gloating. There's no doubt which way Rosberg takes it as he hurls the cap back, hard. It is all conducted in ice-cold silence. They're team-mates of course. Tasty.

I can't imagine that the world of high-speed superbike racing is high on the list of many readers' sport-

ing priorities. But there's never a dull moment. If you think Lewis and Nico can get a bit hissy, check out the MotoGP Grand Prix in Malaysia. Defending champion Valentino Rossi and the Spaniard Marc Marquez go wheel to wheel lap after lap, before the Italian pulls back his leg and kicks his rival off his bike. I think he deserved it. Rossi is the GOAT (Greatest Of All Time), and Marquez wants to take his place. The Italian isn't willing to concede just yet. Riveting stuff, but don't try it at home.

Rossi's working methods might be welcome in the current Chelsea managerial set-up. What on earth is going on? Has Jose gone bonkers? This 'siege mentality' stuff doesn't work if it's you on your own. There seems to be so much pride and ego on the line with Mourinho that failure, when it finally happens, detonates a megaton of destructive fission. And then it all has to be explained away — bad referees, shocking doctors, the wrong kind of balls — because failure can't possibly be admitted. The largely awestruck British media has often said that when José did or said something stupid it was part of a broader cunning plan, normally to 'deflect attention'. That myth has now been ripped bare. Quite often, when Mourinho does or says something stupid, it's just because he's being very stupid. Starting with that repellent victimisation of Eva Carneiro.

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. Many of our best and oldest friends have done so well they have stopped work. Meanwhile my husband still does a 50-hour week. Our friends must have forgotten what it's like to have to get up at six because they're always amazed when we try to leave their dinner parties at a reasonable hour. But the real problem arises when we return the hospitality and they are still at our kitchen table two hours after dinner has been cleared, laughing, joking, saying they've got second wind and can I get the

cheese out again. Hinting doesn't work. Last time my husband even changed into his pyjamas and said goodnight. They chuckled as though he was just being eccentric and carried on until 1.30 a.m. We love our friends despite this, and want to see them, but how could we tactfully persuade them to leave our house at, say, 11 p.m.?

— B.F.B., London W12

A. *Don't give them dinner in your own home. Book an over-popular restaurant like the Wolseley, specifically asking for a table which you must vacate by a certain time to allow for a second sitting. Forces beyond your control will bring the evening to a satisfactory early climax and while they go out clubbing or to 5 Hertford Street, you can cheerily make your way home to bed.*

Q. A great friend's husband has taken to posting on a particular social media site his transit through business-class lounges, smart hotels, premium sports matches and sundry eateries. He appears to be oblivious that this may seem vulgar, and it would be socially difficult to unfriend him. Mary, please rule if this is indeed boorish and, if so, advise on how he can be corrected. We keenly anticipate your guidance!

— C.I., Devon

A. *Most people know that the point of Instagram (a.k.a. Boastagram) is to curate images in such a way that your life looks fabulous. Anyone with a working brain knows that people's lives are not always so perfect, but Instagram is a perfect bubble you enter into, like reading Vogue or Tatler, to pretend for a while.*

It is very possible that this man is posting serial images of his luxury life as an ironic statement on the absurdity of social media. But even if he is taking it all seriously, you must still congratulate him on his superb irony.

Q. Mary, your correspondent trying to escape protracted phone calls with an elderly relative might appreciate this tip. I loved my (late) old mum dearly, but we both hated having to have long phone calls. I would always call five or ten minutes before Coronation Street started. I then knew that she would terminate the call long before I could.

— T.G., Loch Awe

A. *Thank you for sharing this useful insight. Readers should substitute relevant programmes accordingly.*

Food

The Pit of hipsterdom

Tanya Gold



Penny is an all-day café in the former Pit Bar in the basement of the Old Vic, a famous and charismatic theatre on the road to south London. I love the Old Vic on its pavement peninsula on The Cut by Waterloo. Sirens screech past; after a particularly calamitous accident, you can hear them from the stalls. (Best to see a musical here; A took me to *Kiss Me, Kate* when we married, to show he understood me.) It feels — although this may be a lie — like theatre for The People, as they might be but almost never are. It is fierce, shabby and rigorous, although during the 1980 Peter O'Toole *Macbeth* the laughter carried as far as the trains chugging out to Dorking. Now that Kevin Spacey, the film star and artistic director who signed autographs through a hole in the door, like a proper maniac, has left, the Old Vic feels once more like the London of dreams.

It is a disappointment, therefore, to discover that the Pit Bar, now named Penny — for the Penny Lectures held at the Old Vic in 1882 —

Christopher Biggins stood upon that carpet, philistines!

is a dismal hipster café, destroyed by the enemies of the very drama it should adore: laziness and lack of imagination, plus the unwise application of pot plants. For each item sold, a penny will be donated to a charity 'inspired by the theme of the show'; who or what they will support for *The Master Builder*, I do not know. They do these things better — and as cheaply — at Shoreditch House, and that was never a world-famous Victorian theatre.

It is true that my anger begins to curl when I realise the Old Vic has ripped out the lobby carpets and replaced them with some evil, too-dark flooring of the sort that belongs in rental flats beloved by accountants who clutch only their own fear. Christopher Biggins stood upon that carpet, philistines! And here is Penny, beneath the lovely curling staircase, which has seen so many expressions that do not quite work — a dull, blank space with a long bar, some low tables, some high tables, here a bench, here a chair, here a candle, here a pot



'Well, if you ain't cheatin', then where's Mrs Bun the Baker's Wife?'

plant attached to the wall with the kind of webbing that was in fashion when Jimmy Savile was young. It is so un-thought-out that it could be somebody's ugly and ill-designed kitchen, and I have one of those already. I am not suggesting Penny — or Pound, as it should be called, if it wants to preen with hipster nobility — should look like the prop room during *The Pirates of Penzance*, but this is sub-Starbucks. We should be at Attendant, the subterranean Victorian toilet-café in Fitzrovia. That is how you spin an absence. That is how you gild a void.

We have reserved a table; we did not expect a table for eight and, when others land to fill the space, they may be surprised to hear a conversation about which tits are best: small tits or sex tits? (My friend is buying new tits, and she is looking at old masters to choose them, which is a perfectly normal way to behave if you are a well-educated woman in need of new tits.) We order from a typed and deliberately aged menu — a cheese plate, a meat plate, a cheese and ham toastie — and contemplate hipster culture, which is, it seems, to stare at *couture* Sherbet Dab Dabs, which are sold on the bar, a celebration of a cracked — and peculiarly infantile — nostalgia.

The cheese plate (Stichelton, Old Ford, Bartlett, Tunworth) is excellent; the meat plate (coppa, mutton, salami, venison) is frightening; the toastie, which oozes large chunks of what the menu calls, mysteriously, 'jowl', is burnt. We flee faster than we would from *Macbeth*, but mirthlessly.

Penny, The Old Vic, The Cut, London SE1 8NB; www.penny.bar.

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Fulsome

It's funny that two much misused words end in — *some*: *fulsome* and *noisome*. *Noisome* is the less often used at all, and then usually as though it meant *noisy*. There is a word *noisesome* that does mean *noisy*, coined 80 years ago, but *noisome* has meant 'unpleasant' or 'offensive', especially 'smelly', for 400 years or more.

Of the words ending *some* that were in use before the Conquest, only three remain: *winsome*, *lovesome* and *longsome* (meaning 'slow' or 'tedious') and I'm not sure that the last really is still used. The case is different with *fulsome*, which has been around since the 14th century. It is hardly



ever used correctly. In which case, you may ask, has its meaning now changed?

An obsolete meaning of *fulsome* was 'abundant' 'plentiful'. Yet I saw in a newspaper recently a reference to a flourishing tree that was 'for a dwarf patio tree, remarkably fulsome'. I suspect that the writer had no clear notion of what *fulsome* means, and went by its sound, just as most people now use *lumpen* to mean 'lumpy', and not 'ragged' as its German

original dictates. In another paper, I found mention of someone *salivating fulsomely*, again with that suggestion of abundance.

Most commonly *fulsome* is paired with *tribute*, *praise* or nouns of similar meaning. The Scots, we read, were 'accorded a long and fulsome salute by the Tartan Army', or a nanny's professional references were 'fulsome in her praise'. Naturally hobby-pedants jump upon such examples as incompatible with the word's true meanings of 'offending from excess or want of measure' or 'disgusting, repulsive, odious'. Even the pedants do not usually try to foist upon

the word a meaning with which Shakespeare was familiar, 'filthy, obscene', as poor old Othello uses it, before becoming incoherent with rage: 'Lie with her — that's fulsome. Handkerchief — confessions — handkerchief!'

The upshot is that it is hard to employ *fulsome* in the conventionally approved sense without throwing out hints that you know what it really means: 'Mr Xi was showered with fulsome praise — disgusting.' But it's easier not to use it at all, which concedes the ground entirely to the misusers. That could soon seal the word's fate.

— Dot Wordsworth

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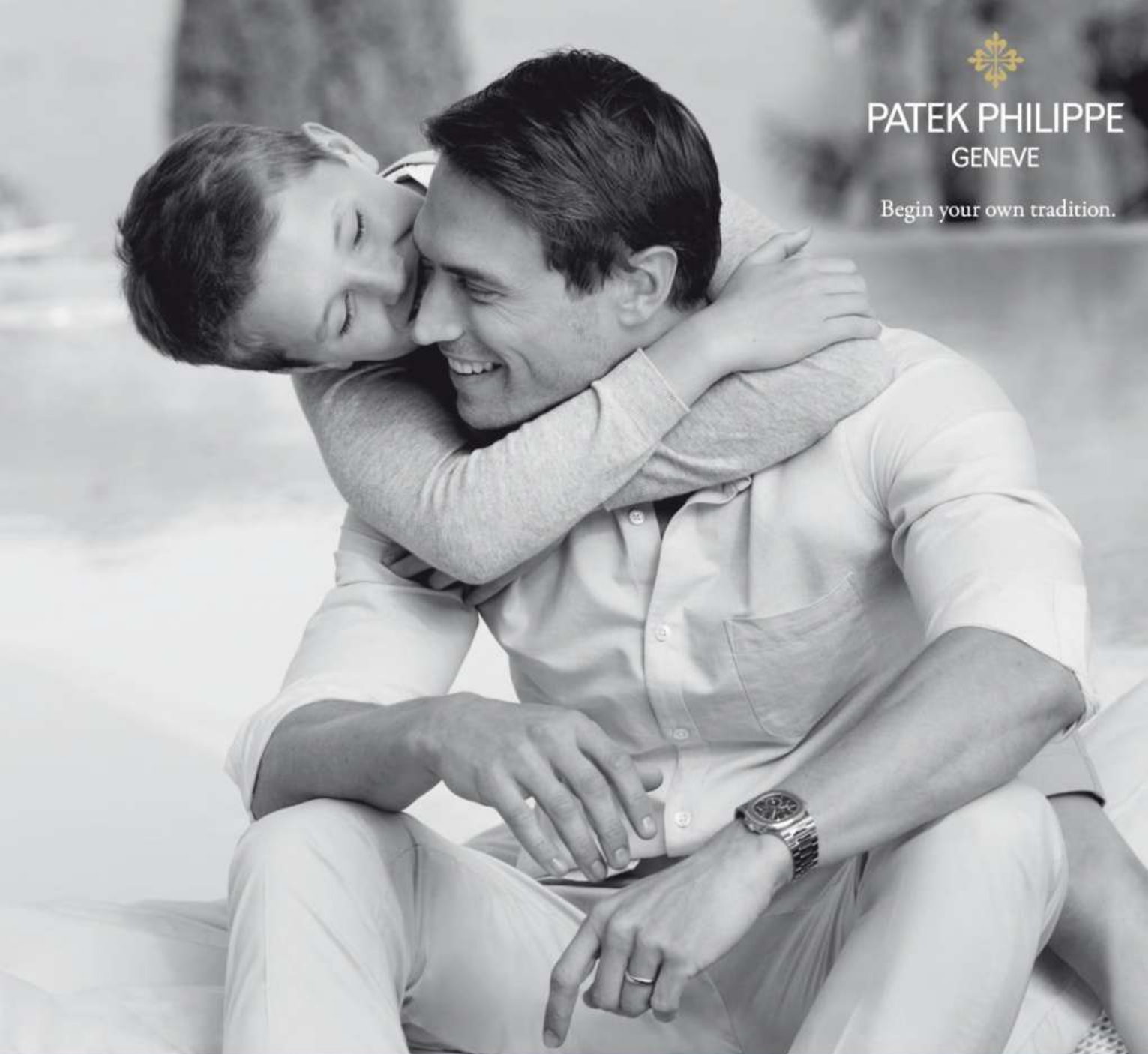
¹The latest independent polling shows 60% of local residents, expressing an opinion supported expansion. The research, the first since the Airports Commission made a unanimous recommendation that Heathrow should expand, highlights a strong level of local support in the constituencies surveyed. The polling organisation Populus interviewed 12,004 residents from Spelthorne, Richmond Park, Brentford & Isleworth, Feltham & Heston, Windsor, Ealing North, Ealing Southall, Uxbridge & South Ruislip, Slough, Hayes & Harlington, Beaconsfield.





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